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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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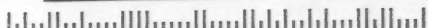
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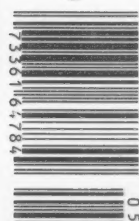
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FEATURES

The Good, the Bad, and the "Gloriously Boring"

Robert MacNeil talks to Neil Hickey about the world of TV news he is leaving behind 27

Mud and the Mainstream

When the Respectable Press Chases the National Enquirer, What's Going On?

By Andrea Sachs 33

Tonya and Me: My Twenty-Four Days on the Slippery Slope

By Jane Meredith Adams 38

It's a Jungle Out There

Environmental Journalism in an Age of Backlash

By Kevin Carmody 40

What's a Bloomberg?

Hint: It's Hot. It Churns Out Financial Stuff. It's Bigger Than a Breadbox.

By Joe Holley 46



27



61

65



DEPARTMENTS

WWWWW.....15

Shining up The Star-Ledger

Feiffer: Photo op

Algerian journalists: the death toll rises

TV's plugola problem

Financial disclosure for journalists?

A swan song in Des Moines

On covering work: the Bal Harbour blues

Sunday magazines: the shrinking scene

Follow-up: Bye bye Street News

TECHNOLOGY.....61

Hanging Out at the Virtual Water Cooler

ABOUT BOOKS.....65

Genius in Disguise:

Harold Ross of The New Yorker

By Thomas Kunkel

Reviewed by Piers Brendon

The American Journey of Eric Sevareid

By Raymond Schroth

Reviewed by Jim Wooten

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.....4

LETTERS.....5

DARTS & LAURELS.....23

SHORT TAKES.....70

THE LOWER CASE.....73

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"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM . . . TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT" From the founding editorial, 1961

Why Write?

Each spring, the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism sponsors a lecture under the aegis of the George Delacorte Center for Magazine Journalism. On March 15, the Delacorte Lecture was delivered by Roger Rosenblatt, director of the center and editor-in-chief of CJR. Here is an excerpt:

When we were kids, the attendant at the man-made river in the amusement park put us in bright blue inner-tubes and sent us down a waterfall and down we would go, spinning, bounding, eyes open, mouth open. But that wasn't the best part. The best part was when you'd hit the bottom of the waterfall, and you would look and see that there was a bend in the river. A bend in the man-made river. What lay around that bend? What promise? What sense of progress?

A bend in the river — always something that purports to give us something more. Not only our own rivers, but the older rivers, the Yangtze, the Congo, the Thames, all leading people somewhere new, somewhere different. Perhaps somewhere better. America is a bend in the river. A place arrived at by water that was supposed to give us equality, freedom, things that were part of a better life. We as a species are supposed to move around a bend in the river.

So why is it about a year ago, I stood on a yellow bridge that spanned that Kagera River between Tanzania and Rwanda, and looked down at the waterfall, not man-made, and saw bodies rise above the waterfall? This was no amusement park. The victims of the Hutu murderers, Tutsies and some Hutus who had sympathized with the Tutsies, their bodies rising over the waterfall and coming down. When they hit the bottom, some of the bodies would get stuck in pools, and some would get stuck on rocks, and others might make it around a bend in the river. If they made it around the bend in the river, they would head toward Lake Victoria. You remember Lake Victoria — one of the spots where civilization was said to begin? You remember civilization?

I don't know why I should have been surprised to see all that death. We recollect from Biology One that we are a slow-evolving species, that it will be eons upon eons before we learn to get along in groups. The debate about the nature of man was always between reason and passion, between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century said that men were to be reasonable. The nineteenth century said that men were to reach for the stars, that people could, in fact, touch God. Three cheers for reason, three cheers for passion.

But what I began to think about in Rwanda is that all this reason versus passion business was bunk. A game. The nature of man lies under the river. Under the Kagera River or

all rivers, sort of like an eel. An eel so long that it traverses the entire river. So long it does not have to move to be wherever it wishes to be. It is in all places. Norman Maclean said: "All things merge into one, and a river runs through it." I don't know much about rivers, but I had a sense of the eel. I had a sense of the monster.

So the question is, in my case and in the case of many of you here: Why write? Why tell stories? The reason I tell stories is to stay on top of the river, to stay afloat and to tell others to stay afloat, to reach for them, to keep us all afloat. Because, for the monsters, there will be once in a while, a spark, a gleam, some light under the dark water. That will be a story, too, and we will tell that story.

Ray Bradbury wrote a story, "There Will Come Soft Rains," about nuclear annihilation. The title of the story comes from a poem by Sara Teasdale on the same subject. If one actually believes that all are going to be annihilated, why write?

Because we have to. Because the thing is in us. It's like a biological fact. We are the stories ourselves, telling one another to one another about one another.

There are good, sound reasons for writing. We learn what we think when we write. It's an odd process, a mysterious process. The sheer play of language, the sheer sound of language: "there will come soft rains."

The hilarity of language. God, I miss George Bush. Bush once said that he admired Vaclav Havel "for living or dying — whatever — for freedom." On the 1988 elections, he predicted "the undecideds could go one way or the other."

We also write to undertake a journey, to create an adventure from the past into the future. We move around the bend in the river. Anticipation is all. The vehicle of that journey is the sentence. The single sentence.

Interesting word, "sentence." There is a finality to it. One is sentenced to death. One is sentenced to watch the O.J. trial. Sometimes one is sentenced to life, which is a nice contradiction in terms.

But for a writer a sentence doesn't achieve finality until the end, and up to that point the sentence is a bend in the river. You begin to write the sentence. You do not know where it will end. Where it will lead. The amazement of this process is that the reader, when he or she reads that sentence, cannot know where it ends either.

And when the sentence comes to a dot, it is strangely both conclusive and unsatisfying. You don't want it to end. At one's best, one writes to find God in the sentence. But God is always in the next sentence. How like her.

The main reason for writing is to call out to others, to make contact with others, to break the silence, which is our most monstrous threat. The force under the river is silent. ♦

LETTERS

THE NEW CYNICISM

A crook then serving as vice president of the United States once castigated American journalists as "nattering nabobs of negativism." Now the *CJR* — the *CJR!!!* — castigates us as "A Generation of Vipers" (March/April). What we have lost in sarcasm we have gained in vituperation.

It is amusing that the first proof of our "deep and abiding cynicism" is an irreverent portrayal of another vice president, Dan Quayle. But your writer, Paul Starobin, is not partisan. He is equally shocked at what he perceives as inadequate respect for the Clintons, Newt Gingrich, Strom Thurmond, and any and all authority figures.

Curiously, he establishes that "many reporters and editors" agree with his indictment of the national press corps. This would seem to be self-contradictory, but it is quite accurate. In every generation, a majority of our trade has been offended by the unruly few who afflict the comfortable.

The great pioneers of investigative journalism a century ago were awarded the epithet "muckrakers." They turned it into a badge of honor, but a generation later, H.L. Mencken could say of the great majority of Washington writers: "A few months of associating with the gaudy magnificoes of the town, and they pick up its meretricious values, and are unable to distinguish men of sense and dignity from mountebanks. A few clumsy overtures from the White House and they are rattled and undone. They come in as newspapermen, trained to get the news and eager to get it; they end as tin-horn statesmen, full of dark secrets and unable to tell the truth if they tried." I dare not imagine what Mencken would make of a Washington journalist who, like Paul Starobin, expresses shock at his colleagues' alleged "knee-jerk assumption that presidents and other politicians do not keep their promises."

Starobin appears to be hopelessly confused about the relative meanings of cynicism, skepticism, and credulity. I.F. Stone wrote that the first thing every journalist

should be taught is that governments lie; to call Stone a cynic would be blasphemous.

JOHN L. HESS
New York, N.Y.

In "A Generation of Vipers," the editor of *Regardie's* is quoted as saying: "All the news in this town [Washington] is manufactured and nobody believes any of it."

No comment could better describe the intellectual flaccidity of the Washington press corps. They whine about manufactured news events, but if a story isn't manufactured — or doesn't lend itself to simplistic conflict treatment — it doesn't get reported. There were press conferences and press kits galore pumping up Whitewater, and so this story was treated as an earthshaking scandal. Nobody held a press conference to announce that the city of Washington was going bankrupt, and so that story never got reported until it was too late.

Good God, man, there's news *everywhere* in Washington — everywhere, that is, except for those manufactured events. Of course covering real news requires intelligence and work. Paul Starobin went straight to the heart of the matter when he said cynicism is "a lazy substitute for curiosity."

TIM HACKLER
Alexandria, Va.

As a teacher of ethics and humanities courses at a university with a prominent journalism school on campus, I have been appalled at the chasms of ignorance that separate the tiny promontories of knowledge possessed by the young people preparing for your profession. What seems missing particularly in their education, journalistic or otherwise, is the intelligent exercise of judgment. This shortcoming is often coupled to a particular blindness to all but the excesses of human personality. Absent judgment and perception, credulousness and cynicism *seem* to be the only alternatives available to them when faced with a claim they cannot understand by someone on whom they must report. Thus, they tell us we have only two options — be a sucker or be a cynic — because



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these are the only two they seem capable of understanding.

J. DENNIS LOWDEN
Kansas City, Mo.

In "A Generation of Vipers" Paul Starobin approvingly quotes Ambrose Bierce on cynics. He misses Bierce on the definition of a reporter: "a writer who guesses his way to the truth and dispels it with a tempest of words." Ninety years on and nothing's changed.

ROBERT NEUWIRTH
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Fortunately, we are a small paper, and I am the reporter as well as the editor. So my ethics are not watered down by someone above me. But there is still a certain amount of pressure, from the public and various political factions, to question all motives to the point of distraction.

The primary function of our jobs is to inform. Anything that goes beyond that — speculation, opinion, questioning motives — belongs on the editorial pages, where everyone can be clear that this is an opinion. That, I feel, is the only way that journalism will gain back the respect that this most noble of professions deserves.

SHAWN M. UNDERWOOD
Managing editor
The Island Gazette Newspaper
Carolina Beach, N.C.

If journalists have a prejudice against face-value explanations, perhaps it's because of the antagonistic relationship we have with public relations professionals, whose entire purpose is to trumpet the good facts and squelch the bad — and who provide most of the face-value explanations people get. If the truth is positive, you can bet that a small army will be shouting it from every hill in no time at all. But if the truth is negative, we have to step in and make sure it gets out, because no one will ever hear it from a p.r. agent. If, having been trained as watchdogs, we find that we don't make good lapdogs — well, there's no shortage of other dogs out there that will be happy to lick your hand.

Maybe Starobin needs to add another category of cynicism to his list: "If Not Us, Who?" Cynicism. But he should also consider that that sort of cynicism may well be the news media's whole reason for existing.

KEITH AMMANN
Copy editor
The Evansville Press
Evansville, Ind.

My compliments to Paul Starobin for an insightful and thought-provoking piece on journalism and cynicism. We humans —

that includes journalists — are very sinful (notwithstanding the similarity of our jobs to that of the herald angels). May God have mercy on us and our profession.

DON HARTING
Liverpool, N.Y.

AFTER YOU

I was surprised and disappointed to see my newspaper singled out for a Dart in a prestigious publication like the *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April). Our alleged sin was "a want of professional manners," in not mentioning another newspaper's work on a story.

The *Union-Recorder* was the first newspaper to report the nature of the investigation into the local district attorney. Our paper was one of at least four papers and several broadcast media that made open-records requests to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for its file on the case. When the first section of that file was released, we gave a detailed account of its contents.

It is true that the *Fulton Daily Report* waged a commendable open-records fight to gain access to the rest of the file and published an excellent story, based on the file. Since that paper is published more than one hundred miles away from our town and is not a member of The Associated Press, our readers had no access to its story. We contacted the GBI, received a copy of the investigative file addendum and did our own story, based on that file. In our story, we said the addendum was released because of "news media requests." Were we obligated to mention the *Fulton Daily Report*? I don't think so. If the answer were yes, I'm sure I'd see a lot more articles published with the accompanying phrase, "This information was first reported by . . ."

DON SCHANCHE JR.
City editor
The Union-Recorder
Milledgeville, Ga.

PRIVACY PIRACY

Your March/April article, "Hidden Cameras, a Million-Dollar Peek," about the *Kersis* case where I represented the prevailing plaintiffs against ABC News in a major victory, including punitive damages, contained a quote by me that would probably lead to an inaccurate reading of what I said, and the context. I told Russ Baker, its author, that the jurors who spent two days viewing outtakes were "appalled and astonished" at the nerve of ABC to invade their privacy so seriously over so long a period,

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AP's coverage of Rwanda wins two Pulitzers.

Associated Press Writer Mark Fritz received the award for international reporting. AP photographers Jacqueline Arzt, Javier Bauluz, Jean-Marc Bouju and Karsten Thielker shared the award for feature photography. The Pulitzers were the 38th and 39th in AP history and the fourth in the last five years for AP photography.



Javier Bauluz



Jacqueline Arzt

MUSHA, Rwanda (AP) —

Juliana Mukankwaya is the mother of six children and the murderer of two, the son and daughter of people she knew since she herself was a child.

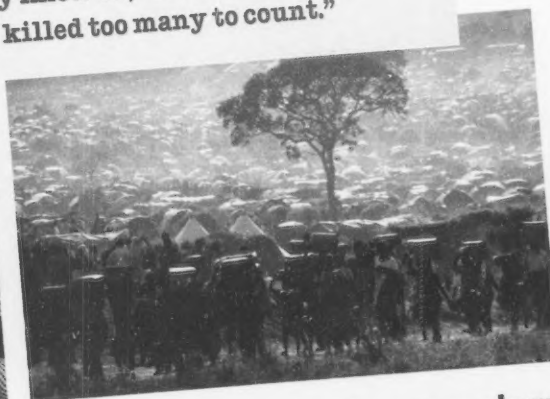
Last week, Mukankwaya said, she and other women rounded up the children of fellow villagers they perceived as enemies. With gruesome resolve, she said, they bludgeoned the stunned youngsters to death with large sticks.

"They didn't cry because they knew us," said the woman.

"They just made big eyes. We killed too many to count."



Jean-Marc Bouju



Karsten Thielker

Great writing and great photos win Pulitzers. But rarely for the same story.

AP

Associated Press

and not, as the article implies, at the nature of the company's work, which was giving psychic advice over the phone. Other than that, the article was a neutral, fair description about hidden cameras, which I believe is what Baker and the fact-checker I interacted with intended.

NEVILLE L. JOHNSON
Los Angeles, Calif.

The editors reply: *Regrettably, overzealous editing removed the context of Johnson's quoted remark.*

PRIMA DONNAS IN THE NEWSROOM

If that "underground guide to newspaper editing" (CJR, March/April) represents a serious complaint from the new breed of reporters, then quite obviously I have lived too long.

In my day — which was not all that far in the past — stories written by reporters were theirs only until turned over to the city desk, which then took possession. Once dummied and assigned a head, they were dealt (remember dealers?) to someone on the rim of the desk, whose property they became.

The copy editor's function was to make of this piece of copy the best story he could. If there were questions, they were addressed to the city desk, whose functionaries made the necessary clarifications and, if necessary, queried the reporter who had produced the copy.

You know, this system worked pretty well until the prima donnas who now populate the newsroom arrived with their newfound sensitivities about the sanctity of their copy.

C. STANLEY GILLIAM
Sacramento, Calif.

CONFUSED READER

Our paper, the *Waterbury Republican-American*, recently received a Dart for a story we ran about Bill Curry, a candidate for governor last year.

The story was about Curry's involvement in the nuclear freeze movement back in the 1980s. His involvement, by the way, wasn't just showing up at a couple of rallies. He was the executive director of Freeze Voter 84, one of the 1984 election's largest PACs.

You said our mentioning his role in Freeze Voter 84 during the gubernatorial campaign was "electing to take the low road." This is where I have become confused.

Have things so changed that it has become wrong to report on a candidate's leadership

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DEADLINE: applications must be in by June 15, 1995

role in a major, widely publicized, and well-funded attempt to influence national policy? Had Curry instead belonged to the Ku Klux Klan or been a Lyndon LaRouche partisan in 1984, would it also have been "taking the low road" to report on that?

As you folks see it, was our duty to ignore Curry's public record and instead assign reporters to dredge up things like the circumstances surrounding his divorce? During the campaign, we received phone calls and faxes urging us to do exactly that, and we refused to take one step along that route.

I'm also a tad confused about your assertion that Curry was leading Rowland at the time our story was printed. The Quinnipiac College Poll, generally considered the leading independent political poll in Connecticut, had Rowland ahead throughout the race. The same day we published the article on Curry, a new Quinnipiac poll was released. It showed Rowland expanding his lead over Curry to 31 percent from 21 percent, well beyond the poll's margin of error. Is there some statewide poll in Connecticut more authoritative than the Quinnipiac Poll that you people know about? If so, we'd like to be advised of it.

Finally, I am unclear about your allegation that the nuclear freeze movement was "Soviet-supported." The phrase is ambiguous, but as used in your note, the wording strongly suggests that groups like Curry's were bankrolled by the Soviet Union.

That is an amazing and serious charge. Our story certainly never said that. But perhaps during the extensive research that went into your "Dart," you folks came across information we didn't find. If so, we would consider it a genuine favor if you would share that information with us.

ED GOODMAN
Deputy managing editor
Waterbury Republican-American
Waterbury, Conn.

CJR replies: *That Mr. Goodman equates the work of Freeze Voter 84 with that of the Ku Klux Klan and Lyndon LaRouche will come as no surprise to anyone who has read his paper's redbaiting story, which, far from "mentioning" Curry's role in the movement, bannered it as a page-one investigation conducted, as a sidebar proudly put it, by a team of editors and reporters working feverishly around the clock, and presented to voters three days before the election. By using the phrase "Soviet-supported," CJR was attempting to characterize, in a minimum amount of space, the essential thrust of the Republican-American's story, which in paragraph after paragraph after paragraph suggested that the movement Curry had worked for was Soviet-inspired, Soviet-*

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organized, and Soviet-funded, and that anyone in the U.S. who happened to favor a freeze was either a communist, a fellow-traveler, a dupe, or a fool. That, at any rate, was the conclusion drawn by the several disgusted readers who recommended the Dart — a conclusion with which CJR agreed. The Dart did err in stating that at the time of publication, Curry was leading Rowland in the governor's race; what it should have said is that the October Quinnipiac Poll had shown Curry beginning to narrow Rowland's lead.

NO SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Chris Nolter's piece on the insurance woes of the fourth estate (CJR, January/February) uses journalists' workers' compensation grouping with clerks and salespeople to demonstrate that we news folk should be considered low risks for any type of insurance.

W/C groupings are not very exact. In Texas, for example, orchard workers are grouped with berry pickers; but falling from the top of an apple tree is generally far more destructive to the insured than tripping over a strawberry vine. So using one's W/C grouping to gauge overall risk is, at best, inexact.

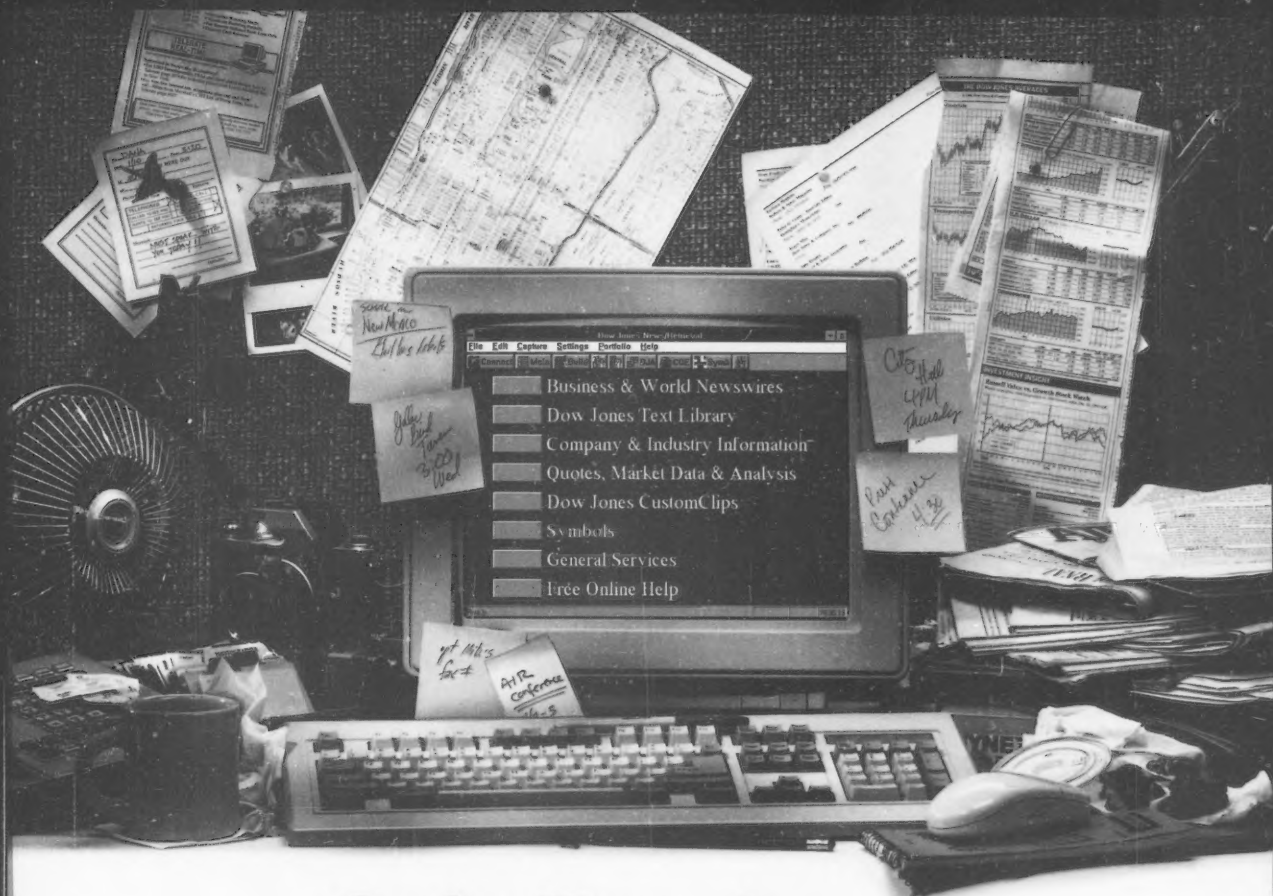
But on the other hand, is clerking all that safe, anyway? The leading cause of death among female workers, who make up the bulk of clerks, is homicide. Statistics suggest that the greater the exposure to the public, the greater the chance of being murdered.

We journalists are exposed to thousands of people we never meet, save for those that are really hacked. So maybe we are not as safe and secure as we would like to think. Yipes!

GLEN E. HARGIS
Editor
Insurance Record
Dallas, Tex.

ADDENDUM

A Dart in the March/April issue to 60 Minutes's Mike Wallace "for ambushing his own troops" was incomplete. Following revelations that, against the express wishes of a free-lance reporter who was helping him on a story, Wallace had secretly taped their conversation; that he had been reprimanded for his actions by CBS; and that the tape had been destroyed, Wallace and the reporter had another conversation — this one taped with her permission and subsequently included in a segment broadcast on December 18. At the end of that segment, Wallace apologized for his earlier lapse.



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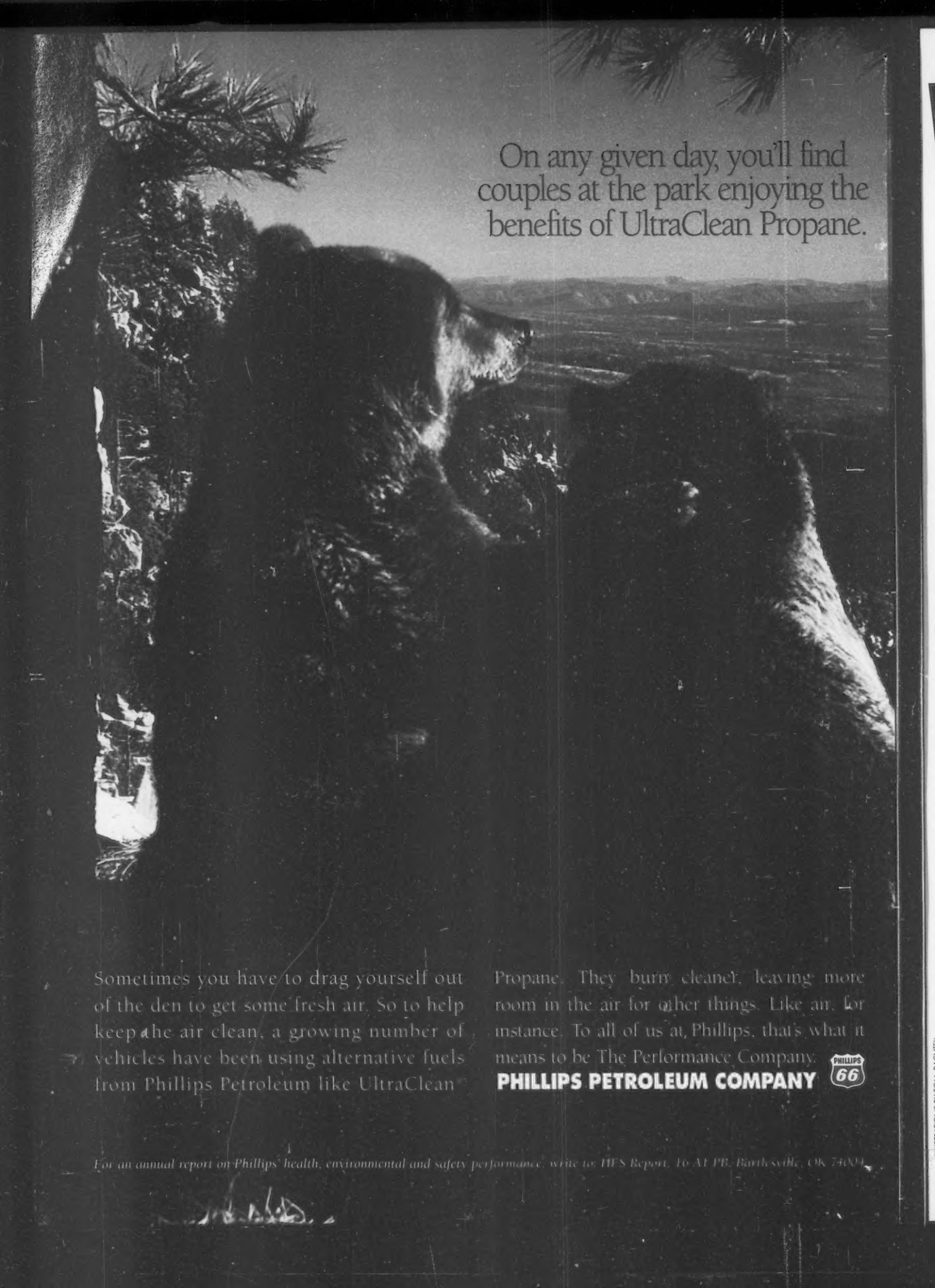
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WHOWHATWHENWHEREWHY

The *Star-Ledger* has always seen New Jersey — from the shore communities in the south through the urban/suburban sprawl of its central counties to the exurban north — as one big hometown, and it has chronicled its citizens' common concerns. A common concern these days is the tumult of change at the *Ledger*.

Comprehensive, successful, and dull, the newspaper was shaped by the obsessive vision of editor Mort Pye, who retired in December after three decades at the helm. It is being reshaped by James P. Willse, who has all of the state wondering what its somnolent giant of a newspaper will be like when it's finally wide awake.

The Newhouse-owned *Star-Ledger* was little more than a scandal sheet when Pye arrived as a top editor in 1957. Assuming full leadership six years later, he tied its fate to that of New Jersey. The paper aggressively promoted development and commerce in New Jersey and followed its largely white, upper-middle-class readers out to the suburbs after they fled the paper's urban base. The *Ledger* thrived while its main competition, the respected *Newark Evening News*, closed up shop in 1972 after a disastrous strike.

Pye's formula included covering the hell out of local sports as well as the state government, building an

the big fix in jersey a brighter star-ledger

enormous statehouse bureau. He dropped the word Newark from the masthead in the early 1960s. "What we set out to do was very simple," Pye says. "It was to create a paper that anybody with interest in what is going on in New Jersey would find it in the paper." All this for 15 cents, until its climb to a quarter in 1990.

In a business sense, Pye's strategy worked. The *Ledger* has a circulation of 455,919 daily and 685,551 on Sundays, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, making it respectively the fourteenth- and twelfth-largest paper in the nation. In a journalistic sense, however, even the paper's admirers had to admit that *The Star-Ledger* could be mind-numbing. Its clumsily designed look was vintage 1949, heavy gray with hard-to-understand headlines; its gigantic newshole was both a blessing and a curse — a huge beast with an insatiable appetite that, combined with weak editing, often produced lifeless prose. The paper some-

times gave the impression it produced type only to wrap around the voluminous ads.

That Willse's every move since he took over in January is still subject to speculation and analysis all around New Jersey illustrates the delicacy of his task. How do you fix a



newspaper that, in an economic sense, ain't broke?

E. Donald Lass, editor and publisher of the *Asbury Park Press*, the state's second-largest paper, wonders how much he would change the *Ledger* if he were running it. Why change when you have such a potent formula for success? he asks. But in a six-page "Memo" to Willse

the *New Jersey Reporter's* Stephen Barr, the "spokesman" for "*Ledger Junkies of New Jersey*," offered a not-so-modest list of requests: better writing, editing, photography, and layout, less dependence on institutional coverage, more explanatory and investigative work, thoughtful editorial and op-ed pages, and so forth. The *Ledger*, the memo said, is "indispensable, but not admired."

In a competitive market, Willse has been reluctant to disclose his vision for the paper, but he leaves no doubt about the company he'd like it to keep. *The Star-Ledger*, he says, can play in the same league as *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Dallas Morning News*, regional newspapers that are both economic and journalistic successes. "The trick," he says, "is to

not lose sight of what is good and valuable about the *Ledger*: its commitment to New Jersey and its communities and the breadth of its information."

Ledger junkies already see a better newspaper, somewhat cleaner looking with more inviting headlines and sharper stories. Reporters say their pieces are now getting

"massaged." "He is asking questions about stories that we've never heard before, which is very exciting," says general assignment reporter Bill Gannon.

One of Willse's first moves was far from subtle. He hired Richard Aregood, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial page editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, to rejuvenate the *Ledger's* editorial section. Aregood, simply put, is everything that *The Star-Ledger's* editorial page never was.

That section had long spoken with a weak, inconsistent voice in editorials that were no more than summations of the news and suggestions and expectations about the future. Aregood, by contrast, writes editorials that are witty, engaging, and combative. "Somebody sedate the senator while we take a look here," he wrote in March, after quoting an emotional Republican state

senator who wants to free developers to build in a protected watershed. And for the kind of money that Henry Cisneros is alleged to have paid to keep his girlfriend quiet, Aregood wrote that the HUD secretary "could be wallowing in a vat of lime Jell-O with four hookers, twelve consenting farm animals, and a partridge in a pear tree to this very day."

The twenty-six-newspaper Newhouse group has a reputation for running some of the most profitable but mediocre papers in the nation. In the past few years, however, it has been hiring respected editors and apparently giving them resources to improve their papers.

In Willse, it got a well-respected and well-organized editor known for his ability to spot talent and give it room to grow. The son of a New York City detective, he

was born on St. Patrick's Day in 1944, and caught the journalism bug by working summers as a copy boy at *The New York Times* and as an intern at *The Wall Street Journal*. At Hamilton College, he studied Yeats by day and covered the cops by night for the *Utica Daily Press* in upstate New York. He joined The Associated Press in 1969, becoming its San Francisco bureau chief, then city editor and managing editor for the *San Francisco Examiner*. It was while he was at the *Examiner* that his photographer, Greg Robinson, was killed, along with congressman Leo Ryan, by followers of the Reverend Jim Jones and his People's Temple cult in Guyana just before the mass suicide there. A grief-stricken Willse put that day's paper to bed and flew to Guyana to cover the tragedy himself. He pro-

duced solid journalism at the New York *Daily News*, his most recent career stop, during some of the toughest periods in the paper's history, notably the bitter 147-day strike in 1990-1991, the death of its phony "savior," Robert Maxwell, in 1991, and its subsequent bankruptcy. When the *News* was finally sold to Mort Zuckerman, Willse had to walk the plank with scores of *Daily News* staff members.

Now he has been handed one of those rare jobs in journalism, a chance to shape a paper that is willing to spend money to improve. "I don't think there is a better editing gig in the country," he says. "This is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity."

Michael O. Allen

Allen is a reporter for the New York *Daily News*. He did not work under Willse.

photo op JIM SEAFER

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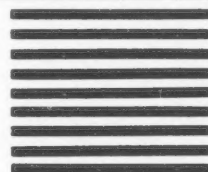
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killing the messengers

thirty-seven murdered journalists

—and counting

Last December, a reporter for Algerian national radio — let's call her Batoul Bachir — was working at the network's offices in Algiers when she received a visit from members of the country's security forces. "They said I should not return to my house," she says, "because they had just killed a leading terrorist, and on his body they found a list of women active in a feminist organization." When they showed Bachir the list, she saw not only her name but also detailed information about "when I returned home and what route I took to get home. They even knew when one of my friends went to visit her mother."

A week later, Bachir left for Paris, where she is currently staying with a sister. For the moment, at least, she has avoided adding her name to another list: the thirty-seven Algerian journalists who have been assassinated in that country since May 1993. The Armed Islamic Group (AIG), the most radical of several organizations fighting to turn Algeria into an Islamic state, has taken credit for many of these killings and is suspected to be behind most of them. Some 40,000 people have lost their lives since the Algerian civil war broke out three years ago, including thousands of insurgents killed by government forces, but Algerian journalists have become a special target for the fundamentalists, who see their commitment to freedom of expression as hostile to the strictures of Islam.

The latest attack was on Mekhlouf Boukzer, who covered sports for the national TV network; he was found with his throat slit on April 4. Before that, Rachida Hammadi

died on March 30 after ten days in a coma; the thirty-two-year-old television journalist had been shot as she walked to work.

In essence, all Algerian journalists are now working under the threat of death. In August 1994, a fundamentalist group kidnapped a journalist in front of the Maison de la Presse — a former military barracks in central Algiers that now serves as offices for some thirty French- and Arab-language newspapers — and released him thirty-six hours later with a letter warning all journalists in the building to stop work or be killed. The AIG has issued a similar threat to all television and radio reporters.

Although at first the fundamentalists targeted journalists who had specifically criticized them, more recently the murders have been directed at reporters who had no obvious political position. As an example, Lazhari Labter, a former correspondent for the journal *Le Pays* who has also taken refuge in Paris, cites the case of Mohamed Salah Benachour, a reporter for the Algerian Press Service who was shot and killed last October south of Algiers. "When we asked him, 'why do you stay at home?' he would reply that he did not side with the government and he didn't write against the Islamists," says Labter. "He had nothing to

do with politics."

Despite the danger, many journalists have continued to work. At the French-language daily *El Watan*, for example, although twelve reporters have quit work or left the country, a permanent staff of thirty remains. "We continue to work because it is a question of principle," says *El Watan* journalist Fayçal Metaoui. "We have chosen this work willingly, knowing the risks."

Fewer have made that choice at the daily *Le Matin*, whose editor-in-chief Saïd Mekbel — one of Algeria's most respected

journalists — was shot to death in a restaurant near the Maison de la Presse last December 3. According to one *Le Matin* reporter, only about twelve journalists are left out of a staff that once totaled forty. And of those who stay on the job, none have continued to live at home, including the many

who have families. "We change places often, we go to friends' houses, or stay in hotels," he says.

One of the few exceptions to this rule occurred a few days after Mekbel's death, when journalists joined several thousand people in a march past the Maison de la Presse to protest the military government's failure to protect the nation's press corps. Yet the government itself lacks credibility when it comes to freedom of expression. Until 1989, after a wave of demonstrations challenged the National Liberation Front's role as sole legal political party, there was no independent press. A multi-party system was legalized

that year and, says Lotfi Cheriet, a journalist with Algerian national television, "the press began to play an important role in Algeria." Nevertheless, last year the government shut down or temporarily suspended several newspapers, usually citing security considerations in the civil war with Islamic fundamentalists.

Although Algerian journalists have protested these measures, most do not see the government as the main enemy. "We have a debate with the government, but it's not a massacre," says Bachir.

No exact figures exist for the number of journalists who have left Algeria, but Labter estimates that perhaps 300 to 400 of the nation's roughly 1,500 reporters have gone, at least temporarily. Most are in France, while others have gone to such countries as Tunisia, Canada, Belgium, and the United States.

Michael Balter

Balter is an American writer who lives in Paris.

SOUNDBITE

"When you go on-line, you basically throw away 400 years of typography — all the stuff we've learned since Gutenberg to make information jump off the page."

Philip Elmer-DeWitt, a Time magazine senior editor who often writes about computers, in The Washington Post.

the plugola problem

Promos have become as much a part of TV news as friendly anchor teams, weather reports, and, well, actual commercials by paying advertisers. From Katie and Bryant right on through the 11 P.M. news, anchors flog upcoming segments of their own programs, offer breathless previews of the evening magazine shows, and pass off unadulterated hype, disguised as "news features," about coming entertainment offerings.

It's happening all over, but perhaps nowhere more flagrantly than in the nation's number-one media market, New York City. And there, a stop-watch survey shows,

Eyewitness News on WABC Channel 7, the ABC-owned-and-operated station, is the chart topper of tease.

Take WABC's 5 to 6 P.M. newscast of Tuesday, October 11 . . . please! In a single forty-seven-minute broadcast (one hour minus some thirteen minutes of paid commercials) there were eleven minutes and thirty seconds of plugola. There were eight bumpers (visual breaks between news segments and the *real* ads), plugging stories coming up later in the newscast, plus five plugs for the 6 P.M. news and two mentions of the 11 P.M. late news. There were promos for *Jeopardy*, *Wheel of Fortune*, ABC's complete prime-time lineup, *Nightline*, and the late movie. There were also reminders to tune in to *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee*, *Rolanda*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* the next day.

It was in the promos-disguised-as-news category that

week, though, that WABC took the cake.

- Monday: a two-minute-thirty-five-second segment about the retirement of Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor's number, which would take place during half-time on ABC's *Monday Night Football*.

- Tuesday: a feature, running two minutes and thirty seconds, puffing the season premiere of *NYPD Blue*, which would be shown later that night on ABC. That particular piece was also promoted three times in bumpers.

- Wednesday: an interview, running two minutes and twenty seconds, with Martin Mull, a star of ABC's *Roseanne*, which ran at 9 P.M. that night.

- Thursday: a one-minute-and-forty-second peek at Regis and Kathie Lee's new project, a book on entertaining.

- Friday: some homeboy cheering — WABC's 6 P.M. anchor, Bill Beutel, was fea-

tured in the "Eyewitness Newsreel" on the occasion of his appearance as keynote speaker at Pace University's Journalism Day.

While WABC might lead the pack, plugola is hardly an opportunity that WCBS and WNBC, other network-owned-and-operated stations in New York, have missed. In the course of the survey, WNBC's *Live at Five* worked in an in-studio interview with one of the stars of NBC's hot drama, *ER*. Over at CBS, David Letterman is mentioned so often a viewer could be forgiven for thinking he's a member of the news team.

A second week of monitoring produced similar results: a plugola-plus-paid-ad average of just over 25 percent of the newscasts at each of the three network-owned stations. WNBC's hour-long *Live at Five*, for example, offered just over eleven minutes of commercials and four minutes of

tease. This was almost double the amount of time the station allotted to national and international news, combined. WCBS's *News at 5* registered an average of twelve minutes and thirty-five seconds of commercials and six of tease.

WABC remained champ; twenty-two minutes, just over a third of the show, were devoted to commercials — fourteen minutes of traditional ads and eight of plugola.

WABC's *Eyewitness News*, incidentally, is not only the most watched newscast in the area, but WABC is the most watched station in New York. It pays, it seems, to advertise.

Jessica Benson and Bill Alden

Benson and Alden are members of New York University's News Study Group, directed by Edwin Diamond. NSG member Michael Wasserman contributed to the research.

Thanks to an idea from the Globe, the voices of Boston's youth were heard throughout New England

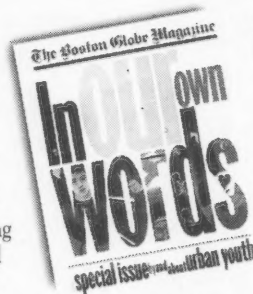
What comes to mind when you think of today's youth? Gangs, drugs, crime, teen pregnancy? All the negatives?

The youngsters argue that it isn't that bad. Media stereotypes, they say. 'You only report the bad stuff. Nobody cares what we have to say.'

Maybe they were right, we thought. So we had an idea: Not only would we ask young people what they thought, we'd let them tell their own stories. Instead of us writing about them, we let them write about themselves.

We gave Boston's youth an entire issue of our Sunday Globe magazine, to let them write about what they wanted about their fears, hopes and desires. About racism, being gay, or coming from broken families.

Several hundred youth were invited to submit articles and poems, with the 40 most compelling selected for



publication. Original artwork, along with some photographs, appeared with the stories.

The result: *In Our Own Words*, a special issue by and about urban youth. It took six months to produce.

And it took New England by storm.

But the printed word wasn't the last word. *With In Our Own Words* as a starting point, the Globe led another unique effort - with three television stations and a corporate sponsor - to produce *With Our Own Eyes* -

an hour-long documentary filmed by Boston's youth and simulcast by the three local stations. Teacher's guides and videos were produced for later distribution in classrooms.

The TV show took nine months to produce. And it took New England by storm. Again. Today's urban youth didn't look - or sound - quite the same as before. Thanks to an idea from The Boston Globe.

The Boston Globe

where the sun doesn't shine financial disclosure for journalists doesn't fly

Journalists don't like to politick on their own behalf; they'd much rather cover politics as a spectator sport. But every so often a few souls in Washington are asked — if not told — by their bureau chiefs to run for the prestigious Standing Committee of Correspondents in one of the congressional press galleries. In the case of the daily newspaper gallery, this is an inner circle, democratically elected, that makes important logistical decisions affecting coverage of both Congress and the national political conventions. Hence the tendency of the bigger newspapers and wire services to exercise their clout to get their people in there.

So this year, chances are that if he had kept quiet, John Harwood of *The Wall Street Journal*, the only candidate from one of the "Big Four" national newspapers, would have won. But instead, Harwood chose to ignite a controversial issue that has divided the journalistic community ever since Ken Auletta's September 12 *New Yorker* article made it the talk of the town: whether journalists should disclose to their peers and the public their "outside income" — that is, income earned from speeches and sources other than their day jobs.

"I think it's time we do a better job of disclosing the sort of potential conflicts we so often expose in the case of public officials," Harwood wrote to 2,000 col-

leagues in a campaign letter. In an interview, he adds, "Given the impact the media have on public policy discussions, we should be willing to subject ourselves to more scrutiny."

This philosophy did not play too well with the masses. As they paid campaign calls around town, Harwood and the *Journal*'s Washington bureau chief, Alan Murray, could hardly help noticing that the disclosure proposal did not excite enthusiasm. "I was surprised," Murray states flatly, "to find out so many of my colleagues oppose the right thing to do."



Yet only a handful of daily gallery members, the so-called celebrity journalists who make substantial money from speaking engagements, would likely have serious outside income to disclose. (Harwood himself says that he earned only \$300 last year from an outside source, for a speech he gave to the World Affairs Council.) The vast majority of the gallery members are beat reporters who might reasonably resent what some see as an invasion of privacy. "What business of the gallery is it what my income is?" says Stephen Green, of Copley News Service, who also ran and lost. "People who are paying

your salary should decide whether you have a conflict or not." Alan Fram of The Associated Press, the big winner, opposed disclosure partly on the ground that reporters are private citizens, not public officials.

Fram and Green see "philosophical perils," as Green put it, in "licensing" reporters by requiring them to reveal certain facts and activities. "That opens up a door we don't want to walk through," says Fram. "What's the next step? Voting registration?"

Of the three press galleries that accredit reporters on

Capitol Hill — the daily, periodical, and radio-TV galleries — only the periodical press gallery requires members to list all sources of earned income. This rule has always applied to the periodical gallery, largely because it receives more applications from people who might be moonlighting as trade association lobbyists, government consultants, or corporate newsletter writers.

Harwood argues that he only wants the daily gallery to do what the periodical gallery already does: put the sources, not the amounts, of outside income on record for any other gallery member to look up. He would go one step further, however, and make records available to the general public, not just journalistic peers: "Put the judgment out there."

Would writing these things down prevent anything impure from taking place? Maybe; environmental law-makers, for example, have found that the most effective laws are the "sunshine"

statutes that made certain polluting practices less common simply by requiring companies to report them.

Anyway, the results are in. Out of a field of five, Harwood lost narrowly to the three winners: Fram of AP, Sue Kirchhoff of Reuters, and Bill Welch of *USA Today*, none of whom share his views. Is financial disclosure for journalists an idea whose time has come? If Harwood's loss is a good sounding of the current state of journalistic opinion, the answer is: not yet.

Jamie Stiehm

Stiehm writes for *The Hill*, a Washington weekly that covers Congress.

a swan song in des moines

In 1981, when a young editorial writer, Geneva Overholser, was first hired at *The Des Moines Register*, the paper was closely held by descendants of Gardner Cowles, a family that gave highest priority to publishing a top-notch paper. When she returned as its editor in 1988, after a stint on the editorial board of *The New York Times*, the *Register* had become a Gannett property. Stock analysts and the company's thousands of stockholders imposed different priorities. Gannett, of course, is not the only media company at which editors face bottom-line pressures, but it is one of them, and Overholser's rise to become one of the more visible and respected newspaper editors in the nation was not without struggle against such pressures.

She gave up the struggle in February, as did her managing editor, David Westphal.

Both resigned, staying only long enough to insure an orderly transition. (She was named in April to be *The Washington Post's* new ombudsman.) The resignations were widely seen, as *The New York Times* put it, as "public symbols of a battle between news professionals and business executives that is raging behind closed doors at many of the country's newspapers."

In 1990, at the company's year-end meetings, Gannett honored Overholser as its "editor of the year." Perhaps this surprising and previously unpublished conclusion of her acceptance speech best suggests just what it is that Overholser was getting tired of:

Here's my dream for the next risk-taking, history-making endeavor: Let Gannett show how corporate journalism can serve all its constituencies in hard times. As we sweat out

the end of the ever-increasing quarterly earnings, as we necessarily attend to the needs and wishes of our shareholders and our advertisers, are we worrying enough about the



other three? About our employees, our readers, and our communities?

I'll answer that: no way. And we're not being honest about it. We fret over declining readership and then cut our newsholes so that we have insufficient space to do the things we know readers like. We fret over a decline in service to our customers, and then pay reporters (and others throughout the company) wages that school districts would be ashamed of. . . .

Our nation is crying out for leadership, our communities are crying out for solutions, and newspapers can help — newspapers that are adequately staffed, with adequate newsholes. But not newspapers where underpaid people work too hard, and ad stacks squeeze out editorial copy.

I'm blessed to be the editor of a great newspaper, but too many people in my newsroom think the greatest years are past, and we're just hanging

on by our fingernails. Too often by far, being an editor in America today feels like holding up an avalanche of pressure to do away with this piece of excellence, that piece of quality, so as to squeeze out just a little bit more money.

Yet we work in a business in which "hard times" mean a 25 percent profit margin cut to 18 percent. We need to be honest about the impact of this fact on our communities, our employees, and our readers, as well as our advertisers and our shareholders.

Gilbert Cranberg

Cranberg, who hired Geneva Overholser at the Register in 1981, is the paper's former editorial page editor. He is now George H. Gallup professor of journalism at the University of Iowa's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Everyday, irregardless of his homework, Jeffrey went "rollerblading" because it was to nice to lay around with his nose in a english book.

Of the 7 errors in this headline, "rollerblading" as a verb strikes us as most extreme. Other common misuses of the Rollerblade brand name include "rollerblades, rollerbladers, blades, bladers and blading." Remember, the careful writer skates on in-line skates known as Rollerblade® skates.



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the bal harbour blues

a "labor hack"
thinks about
work

Bright blue skies and a delicious high in the low 80s. The swimming pool in Bal Harbour, Florida, is packed, the bar service is slow, and we are chatting about the plight of the working stiffs.

I squeeze under an umbrella to escape the sun, and also to listen more closely to a union official, a fellow in his mid-thirties, stretched out on a beach chair, who drops his voice as he grouches about out-of-touch union bosses and worries about increasingly frustrated \$5-an-hour workers.

Here it is again, this feeling of being disconnected.

I am always hit with it when I cover the AFL-CIO's executives, the leaders of its thirty-one major unions, as they gather in Bal Harbour for their annual winter meeting. But the feeling goes deeper than the irony of mulling working Americans' future from the sunny poolside of a luxury hotel.

It is really about being a labor hack, a vestigial organ in most U.S. newsrooms. At an AFL-CIO national convention two years ago in San Francisco, I dreamt I was the last person to cover unions. Next morning I scampered through the hotel's halls looking for colleagues, and couldn't find any of the few on hand.

The root of my confusion is a disconnect between the lack of workplace coverage in U.S. journalism and my conviction that not only do most Americans care greatly about work, about how it defines and governs their lives, but they are

obsessed with it. They worry about whether their jobs are secure, whether they have health care benefits, whether they'll get pensions when they retire, whether their wage hikes will ever perk up again and let them catch up with Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, and whether they'll ever balance long hours on the job with their families' needs.

So, why the media myopia about labor and workplace issues?

Because there are fewer labor writers? By the AFL-CIO's count, there are nineteen full-time labor writers across the nation, and most, according to the labor federation, work for the business pages of newspapers, as I do. Some twenty-five years ago, the AFL-CIO counted nearly two hundred labor writers.

I suspect the ranks of labor writers have dwindled because they, like the unions, failed to keep up. They covered strikes and contracts and not, say, the working mothers' dilemma. Also, the numbers are misleading; there are many reporters who touch on workplace issues these days, without the labor label; they cover economics, write career advice columns, and so forth. Some of them have taken up the slack, writing about such issues as the spread of low-wage jobs, the continuing pockets of serious workplace casualties, the persistence of sexual harassment on the job.

Yet when all this is added up, something is still missing. The focus is often too scattered and too soft. There have been too many stories without fingers pointed, facts put into

order, context included, or follow-ups taken, too many instances where the media have simply failed to analyze what's happening to workers and the economy.

Part of the problem seems to be a lack of a transition between the old and the new labor coverage. Too many old-style labor writers get trapped in institutional coverage, covering

what unions say, and not what they do or don't do, how they affect employees. Too many of the newer journalists who write about the workplace don't seem to understand that, diminished or not, labor unions give working people — union or nonunion —

their only collective voice. And since 84 percent of the total number of employees in the U.S. do not belong to a union, their stories are not as easily accessible, and too many of them go untold.

What to do about all this, in Bal Harbour, anyway? A week in Florida with the heads of the 13.3 million-member AFL-CIO is usually a risky exposure to frozen meeting rooms and tight-lipped union executives. The result: lifeless prose with little meaning to millions of workers.

But this time I am stirred, a bit re-connected. Unlike previous gatherings, this one had some sizzle, some connection to what is happening to American workers:

After weeks of plotting, a group of union leaders try to get seventy-three-year-old AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland not to run for re-election this

fall. Appearing angry and wounded, the aging lion fights off the drive and the issue is left unresolved, at least until the AFL-CIO's convention in October in New York. One union leader suggests that some of his colleagues are so much at odds with Kirkland because they need a fighter, because they fear that the GOP will gut everything they value.

Indeed, the union leaders face a group of glum politicians who warn of great setbacks for labor in Washington. Republican representative William F. Goodling, chairman of the House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee, tells the leaders that, in fact, the nation's labor laws are up for review.

Meanwhile, a group of workers from Decatur, Illinois, who are walking picket lines because of long-term disputes, make an unsolicited appearance, pleading for help from the union leaders. The leaders hustle by them in the hotel's hallways, looking uncomfortable, offering a visual metaphor for the strained connection between labor's top and bottom.

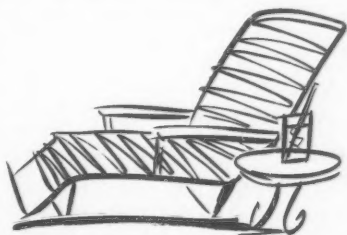
At one of the last cocktail parties, after the crowd has thinned, I come across a friendly union president who has begun to open up to reporters. Peter Szekely, Reuters's labor writer, is beside me.

How come you guys cover labor, the union president asks us, drink in hand, smiling. Is it some form of punishment?

I wonder, maybe it is. But I'd choose it again.

Stephen Franklin

Franklin is a labor writer for the Chicago Tribune.



is sunday shrinking?

In its March/April 1992 issue, CJR reported on the slow disappearance of locally produced Sunday magazines, down from about sixty to almost half that over the last decade, and the rise of the national syndicated magazines, *USA Weekend* and *Parade*. Since then, *Dallas Life of The Dallas Morning News*, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune's Sunday Magazine*, and the *Rhode Islander Magazine* of the *Providence Journal-Bulletin* have also folded. Today, with their mortality in mind, Sunday magazines are adapting to competition for readers and advertisers.

The adaptations often don't bode well for the kind of journalism the magazines can do best — getting at the news “a little more slowly, in better context with more emotion, storytelling, and nuance,” as Avery Rome, editor of *Inquirer Magazine*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer's Sunday magazine*, put it. Last fall, *The Boston Herald* replaced *Sunday People* with four rotating theme supplements — *Informed*, *Home-*

Style, *Your Style*, and *Health and Fitness*. The *Detroit Free Press Magazine* is planning to replace its long pieces — called “downers” by some readers, according to deputy editor Wendy Warren Keebler — with shorter stories.

On another level, and in a unique and potentially compromising arrangement set up for survival, the editorial department of *Images*, the magazine of the *San Antonio Express-News*, now reports to the newspaper's vice president of advertising. “We do have a better communication with our advertising department,” says *Images* editor Beverly Purcell-Guerra, who adds that “we have also been allowed to keep our distance and integrity.” *Images* was revived by the advertising department, she says, after the *Express-News* discontinued production of a Sunday magazine. In the new version, editorial and advertising cooperate in deciding the theme of stories.

The recently launched *Houston Life*, published by Gulf Communications, was distributed by *The Houston Post* before that paper's demise. Gulf Communications is talking to the *Houston Chronicle* and, meanwhile, switching to subscription circulation. Former

associate publisher Roger Tremblay describes the publication as “an upbeat, positive magazine that says Houston is a wonderful place to live.” Next year, Gulf Communications will begin a similar life-style

FOLLOW-UP

bye bye street news?

New York's “Soul and Spirit of the Street,” as *Street News*, a paper sold by homeless people, calls itself, is in jeopardy. This is due in large part to the city's decision to enforce codes against panhandling and selling on the subway (over 70 percent of its readers were riders). Publisher Sam Chen decided he could no longer afford to carry the paper's losses, and put out a “Bye Bye” issue in January.

Still, the inspiration of *Spare Change* in Boston, *The Big Issue* in London and Glasgow, *Streetwise* in Chicago, *Spare Change* in Toronto, *Street Sheet* in San Francisco, and *La Rue* and *Macadam Journal* in Paris, is not about to give up without a fight. Editor-in-chief Janet Wickenhaver and four staff members working on a volunteer basis put out a spring issue and hope to keep *Street News* alive.

They can point to some positive developments: circulation had grown from a low of 8,000 in 1983 up to 20,000 in February 1994 when the subway crackdown began. Its quality has varied in the past, but recently *Street News* was producing compelling stories like “The Suzi Chronicles,” the story of a young mother's battle to get straight from drug addiction, and “Back from Crack,” true tales of overcoming. On a lighter side, the publication recently boasted of “over 250,000 copies confiscated by the MTA.” Wickenhaver agrees that the paper must change to survive, that it “can't survive by continuing to appeal to sympathy alone.”

Matthew Leone

Leone is an intern at CJR.

SOUNDBITE

“The business side of the broadcast industry ought to educate the editorial writing side of the broadcast industry. I mean, I went into a major cable company that owns a daily newspaper and the newspaper's editorial page is attacking the very position of the cable company. I think the managers ought to sit down in a room with their writers and talk through market economics.”

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, in an interview published in the March 20 *Broadcasting & Cable*.

magazine for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Elliot Krieger, the editor of the *Rhode Islander Magazine* of the *Providence Journal-Bulletin* before it was replaced by *Parade*, describes this trend as “the Wal-Marting of Sunday newspapers.”

Meanwhile, local Sunday magazines are facing more nationally syndicated competition targeting niche markets. *Tilt*, owned by Metromarketing Resources Inc., is a pop culture magazine scheduled to appear this August aimed at “the MTV audience.” *Tilt* will enter a revenue-sharing agreement with newspapers. Bloomberg L.P.'s *Bloomberg Personal*, launched last year, is already distributed by eighteen newspapers. And *Disney's Big Time*, written for children, will soon be on the Sunday scene.

Matthew Leone

HARD NUMBERS

Women on the Rise in Network News: 1984 to now

NETWORK:	JOB:	1984	CURRENT
ABC	vice presidents	1	4 of 16
	bureau chiefs	2	2 of 8
	executive producers	0	5 of 16
	senior producers	4	6 of 23
CBS	vice presidents	1	2 of 10
	bureau chiefs	1	2 of 9
	executive producers	1	4 of 8
	senior producers	4	14 of 33
NBC	vice presidents	1	1* of 2
	bureau chiefs	2	9 of 14
	executive producers	0	1 of 7
	senior producers	1	4 of 7
Totals:		18	54 of 153

Sources: all numbers from the networks. *Vice presidents managing the news division; no comparable positions in 1984.

Prepared by Robert Lissit, a former network news producer who teaches journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

Darts & Laurels

◆ **LAUREL** to the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and reporters Sharon Schmickle and Tom Hamburger, for an exposé of the most honorable kind. In a page-one series "Who Owns the Law?" (March 5-6), Schmickle and Hamburger revealed that over the past twelve years seven Supreme Court Justices, including four (O'Connor, Stevens, Scalia, and Kennedy) still on the bench, as well as a number of federal justices around the country, had enjoyed first-class, all-expenses-paid winter trips to luxury resorts in Hawaii, California, Florida, and the Caribbean, where they gathered to select the winner of the \$15,000 prize awarded annually to a judge for "Distinguished Service to Justice" by West Publishing, a Twin Cities-based company that is the major printer of court opinions as well as a frequent litigant in copyright cases; and that, over those same twelve years, those very same judges heard cases involving the company which were decided invariably in favor of West. Supported by such evidence as reproduced photocopies of letters from, among others, Justice Lewis Powell, in which he suggested that "Caneel Bay [a posh Virgin Islands resort] is a place my wife Jo and I have always hoped to visit" (and which indeed turned out to be the site selected for the committee's next meeting), and by a graphic timeline in which names, dates, and destinations of the golfing and tennis-playing justices were juxtaposed against dates of the outcomes of cases affecting their host, the series was further augmented with judiciously balanced sidebars on the (disapproving) reaction of ethicists, the (disingenuous) response of West, and summaries of each of the various cases in which the Court's rulings allowed West to retain near-monopolistic dominance in its highly lucrative field.

◆ **DART** to the Butte, Montana, *Standard*, for programmed news. When Micron Technology announced in December that Butte was on the short list of thirteen cities being considered for the company's new \$1.3 billion computer-chip plant, the paper got right on line. Under the direction of editor Norm Lewis, who promptly became a member of the local development group's Micron Task Force, the paper logged in with favorable stories and fawning editorials, accentuating the positive (thousands of new jobs), mostly eliminating the negative (further depletion of the area's already seriously threatened water supply),

and barely messing with anything in between. In place of fair examination of the Micron proposal, the *Standard* published welcoming posters for readers to mount in the windows of their offices, shops, and homes, as well as page-one We Want Micron pledges to be signed and sent to the paper. "One of the factors that will determine where Micron decides to locate its new manufacturing plant is community acceptance," an editor's note explained. "You can do your part." Certainly the editor was doing his.

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Boston Globe* and reporters David Armstrong and Shelley Murphy, for "Risky Ride," a stomach-lurching trip through the downside of elevator/escalator safety. Based on a four-month investigation, the three-part series (December 4-6) rang the alarm on the many ways the public's safety has been shafted, documenting the lax inspections, irresponsible management, cozy relationships between manufacturers and inspectors, and inadequate regulations, as well as the rising incidence of malfunctions and maimings, freefalls and fatalities, in Massachusetts and beyond. "I don't like elevators or escalators," public safety commissioner Larry F. Giordano was quoted as saying. "I use the stairs." On December 2, after warning state officials of the *Globe's* impending series, Giordano announced that he would be stepping down.

◆ **DART** to Oregon Public Broadcasting, for a strangely developed sense of viewer sensibility. So alert were station executives to the disturbing power of a *Nova* documentary on America's Grand Canyon that they apparently felt obliged to introduce it with a warning of possible offense — but whether that offensiveness lay in the evolutionary message of the canyon's rocks, as one viewer suspected; or in the frightening turbulence of its rapids, as the president of OPB attested in a letter to the viewer; or in the two-second rear-view shot of a male geologist skinny-dipping in its river, as the program director told *CJR* — was anybody's guess. (Maybe it was all those "dams.") Oddly enough, however, the program immediately following on OPB that February 28 night, *Frontline's* illuminating "Rush Limbaugh's America," elicited no similarly protective impulses from station executives, who evidently saw nothing potentially

objectionable in the vacuum-suction sound effects of a Limbaugh "caller abortion"; in his "safe talk" microphone sporting a condom ("Yes, it is lubricated. Yes, my hands are greasy"); in the crude advice on "how not to get AIDS in America if you're a man: you do not ask another man to bend over and make love at the exit point"; or in the misogynistic explication of the origins of feminism ("... so that unattractive ugly broads could have easy access to the mainstream. . . . Bunch of cows!"). What manner of viewer, one wonders, could OPB have had in mind when it saw a need to issue a warning not against such ideological ordure but against the enjoyment of nature in a birthday suit?

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Denver Post* and staff writer Paul Hutchinson, for a journalistic touchdown. When the Denver Broncos football team kicked off a pre-Christmas campaign for a new football stadium — a stadium to be paid for by extending the sales tax levied in 1990 to build baseball's Coors Field — Hutchinson tackled the proposal by looking at the record books. His front-page January 3 report recapped in behind-the-scenes detail the four-year history of the ballpark, play by sorry play — from the misguided arguments for its necessity to the broken promise of its size, from the huge concessions to its owners to the ugly betrayal of its design, from the wildly optimistic predictions of revenues to the hopelessly underestimated cost to taxpayers, now swollen from an original \$50 million to a since-revised \$97 million to a current \$200.3 million and counting. With the new stadium proposal shaping up as an issue in the coming election for mayor of the sports-crazy city, Hutchinson has given voters a handy scorecard for following — and betting on — the stadium game.

◆ **DART** to the Orange County, California, *Register*, for unholy journalism. Under the byline of one Chris Meyer and accompanied by a photograph credited to one Ron Londen, the *Register* of Monday, November 28 offered in the page-one, above-the-fold spot of its Metro section an inspirational piece on a fund-raising campaign of a local church. What was not revealed is that both Meyer and Londen attend the church and are *Register* editors too.

◆ **DART** to *Chemical & Engineering News*, published by the American Chemical Society, for pouring contaminated oil on troubling journalistic waters. Getting wind of the news that staff writer Wilbert Lepkowski's year-long investigation into the dismal history of Ashland Oil and its legal and environmental woes was just about ready to erupt, Ashland vice president John Brothers flew from

company headquarters in Ashland, Kentucky, to Washington, D.C., where he and ACS executive director John Crumb had a little chat. Did the v.p. remind the director that the image of the industry might get a little stained? Or of the large number of *CEN* subscribers employed by Ashland Oil? Whatever was said, following that meeting the Ashland piece was sunk. "To continue work on the article would not have been in the long-term interests of the magazine," editor Michael Heylin later explained to *Corporate Crime Reporter*. The question of whether it would have been in the best interests of the public didn't seem to come up.

◆ **DART** to James J. Cramer, columnist for *Smart Money* magazine, for lowering the stock of financial journalism while making a killing for himself. As revealed by *Washington Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz, between the time Cramer prepared the copy for his February column and the time the magazine reached its 550,000 subscribers, Cramer — who also heads the New York money-management firm of Cramer & Company — added to his holdings with some 200,000 shares of three "orphan" stocks he named that "cry out to be purchased," thereby profiting, at least on paper, by some \$2 million when readers predictably rushed to adopt them as their own. Compounding this apparent conflict of interest was, among other journalistic fans, *The New Republic*, which in a March 20 editorial dismissed those who dared to question Cramer's actions as being "overwrought" or "envious" or "stupid." For one thing, the apologia noted, Cramer is an "extraordinarily graceful writer" who does "articles for us two or three times a year"; for another, "he is an investor of his and other people's funds, including some of us at *TNR*." Reflecting on the episode in a March 28 op-ed piece in *The Washington Post*, James K. Glassman, who currently writes the *Post*'s Big Money column (and who, "as a former publisher of *The New Republic*," he disclosed, "briefly participated in a Cramer fund in the late 1980s"), predicted that it is precisely on such "irreconcilable activities" as Cramer's that "the next great American scandal" will center. "Members of the press just don't apply the same ethical standards to their peers that they apply to politicians, judges, and business big shots," Glassman observed. "Some day soon, that kind of moral ignorance and arrogance will have consequences far, far worse than the Cramer affair." (Cramer, it should be noted, also wrote for *CJR* in the early 1980s, but to the best of our recollection offered no investment advice to the editors, presumably knowing a dry hole when he sees one.)

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

THE GREAT HEALTH CARE REFORM DEBATE THAT WASN'T.

"Media in the Middle: Fairness and Accuracy in the 1994 Health Care Reform Debate" is a special report from The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. This report also includes a videotape of the television special "The Great Health Care Debate" with Bill Moyers and Kathleen Hall Jamieson originally broadcast on

the PBS network, and a videotape of a symposium held at the National Press Club with health care reform advertisers and the media. For a free copy of the report write or fax your request on business or publication letterhead to: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, POB 2053 Princeton, New Jersey 08543. Fax: (609) 275-3767.

Funds for this project were made available from

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A Conversation

The Good, the Bad, and the “Gloriously Boring”

Robert MacNeil talks to Neil Hickey
about the TV news he is leaving behind



In Pakistan for BBC-TV

Robert MacNeil — called “Robin” by just about everybody — was born in Canada, and was an aspiring actor and playwright before turning to journalism forty years ago. This October he departs The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour after twenty years of exploring — five nights a week on the Public Broadcasting Service — the day’s major news stories. In between, MacNeil has covered (for NBC News) the fighting in the Belgian Congo, the civil war in Algeria, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis, and the assassination of President Kennedy, among many other assignments. From 1967 to 1971, he was a reporter for the BBC’s prestigious *Panorama* series, and then joined PBS’s NPACT (the National Public Affairs Center for Television) as a senior correspondent. In the conversation that follows he takes stock.

Neil Hickey: Let’s get right to the main question. You’re leaving The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour in October. Why?

Robert MacNeil: It will be the twentieth anniversary of the start of the program in 1975, and there’s a certain symmetry in that. I think it’s just long enough to do anything. It will also be a few months shy of my sixty-fifth birthday. And I’ve been putting off for many years what I set out to do, which was to become a writer — a writer of fiction, plays, novels. I came into journalism because I had to earn a living. I tried over the years to write fiction on the side but it didn’t really work. And I want to get my head back.

NH: What does that mean?

RM: If you’re in journalism you must fill your head every day with the raw material of journalism — mostly the politics of the day, the affairs

BBC-TV

I haven't seen new things on public television that reinforce the brand image, as something you only see on that channel

of the world. The average citizen has the luxury of doing that when he chooses. And I would like to have that luxury back.

NH: *It looked to some people as though you are simply deserting the sinking ship of public broadcasting at a time when a Republican Congress is questioning whether it deserves to survive.*

RM: Let me tell you the chronology of the decision. Jim decided that whenever I did leave, he wanted to do the program alone and not have a co-anchor. We concluded that it made sense for the program to devolve toward Washington — to have it come from one city and not two. The business of switching back and forth, like the old Huntley-Brinkley show, added a certain spurious drama to the program, some showbiz, variety, pace, those things. Now that it's well-established it doesn't need that artificial prop anymore, and clearly it saves money to eliminate the duplication of facilities.

NH: *Is public broadcasting a ship that's going down? Does it indeed deserve to receive taxpayer money, while many cable channels are doing similar programming on a commercial basis?*

RM: I don't think it's at all certain that public television is sinking. And of course it deserves to survive. The notion that in this rich nation, with such huge cultural diversity, there can't be one corner reserved for the public interest — that's a crazy idea. When every other country in the world that I'm aware of has reserved not only a tiny splinter of the spectrum but large chunks of it for public TV. And the notion now that Republicans, and some people like George Will, are claiming that everything public television does could be done on cable ignores the fact that many programs they praise would never have been made on cable. The *NewsHour* is one of them. If Ken Burns walked into any commercial network and said he wanted to make ten hours on the Civil War using black and white stills and actors reading letters, with a little bit of music in the background, he would have been laughed out of the office. As we would have been.

I think some of the failure of public television over the last few years is that it has not continued to generate new programs that tested the boundaries the way *The Civil War* did, the way we did. I haven't seen arriving new things that reinforce the brand image, as something you can only see on that channel.

NH: *Shouldn't there be more journalism on public TV? It's a kind of journalistically-chal-*

lenged network.

RM: It isn't the number of hours, it's the quality of programming and the aesthetic that is different. People come to public television because what they get is different. It's quieter, it's more thoughtful, it's less intrusive, abusive.

NH: *Public television doesn't even have a news division as such — no systematic coverage of hard news.*

RM: As you know from the history of public television, it was hard enough for a long time to persuade a majority of stations that we should be doing *anything* in the public affairs area. Many of them thought their mission should be cultural and educational and entertainment at the high end of the taste spectrum. They would say, look, commercial television is doing enough news, we don't need any more and that isn't our business and it'll only be controversial and it'll get us in trouble.

NH: *But you know that public radio is a wonderful source of news and public affairs. Why isn't public television as happy a home for news?*

RM: I don't know. I don't know. Partly it's economics. It's so much cheaper to do it on the radio, and to do it well, as they do. Think of starting a *Morning Edition* on public television. Hugely expensive. And carrying it on hour after hour in the time zones and updating it the way they do. I think a television equivalent of that would be even more expensive than our program, which is the single most expensive program on public television. Also, you can't consume a public television program while you're driving to work. You can do almost anything while listening to NPR. Some people say you can do that with our program too. Incidentally, our program as you may know is also a radio show in many cities.

NH: *How has television journalism changed in the twenty years you've been doing this job? What's better and what's worse?*

RM: What's better is the equipment, the technical side, much more portable. You can originate from anywhere virtually instantaneously. What's worse about it is that it has lost a lot of the seriousness and dignity that it had twenty or thirty years ago. I have tapes of the Huntley-Brinkley show from 1963 and '64. And they are models of such dignity and decorum compared with their successor product.

There was almost no graphics. Huntley and Brinkley — and Cronkite was doing the same — were reading stories that would seem interminably long today, off pieces of paper, not even using TelePrompTers.

What has been the aim of commercial televi-

Neil Hickey is a contributing editor to TV Guide.



MacNeil and Lehrer on the *NewsHour* set: a twenty-year partnership comes to an end.

sion news, going back to the days when the three networks commanded the attention of ninety percent of television homes? It was to capture the largest part possible of that ninety percent. The ninety percent has now shrunk to fifty percent among the three networks, and there are many other channels offering information. So the scramble to get a chunk of that reduced percentage, a smaller piece of the pie, is more frantic.

It was always true of commercial television that it had to broadcast for the inattentive and the uninterested as well as for the attentive and the interested. A very strange proposition when you think of it. And it seems to me that it chases its own tail more and more and more. If three large, rather dignified jungle cats were competing for jungle territory thirty years ago, it's three much smaller cats now, in a much smaller sack fighting each other in a much less dignified way.

Obviously there is an interaction between the American people and what they're given. Newspapers have become a great deal less serious than they used to be. Print newsmagazines have changed their standard diet and are chasing a kind of sociological news that is very different in content than what they regarded as news before. So, to my rather austere, I suppose, way of looking at it, the general trend has been downwards. We can report from anywhere. But we seem to report from fewer places and report more obsessively and hysterically about those things we know will capture the largest audience. I mean the attention to the O.J. Simpson trial, while perfectly understandable for Court TV and perhaps CNN — which sees its ratings fall when it doesn't go to war — it's just very strange to see that story dominate the nightly news of the three great television networks. Sure, cover it, and maybe come back once a week, but the coverage is obsessive.

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NH: *It's been said that TV journalism's responsibility is to give people not only what they want to know but what they need to know to be decent citizens and to cast their votes sensibly.*

RM: Of course — in that old, paternalistic, elitist way that would be so incorrect nowadays. But it seems to me that news organizations, including some newspapers and newsmagazines and television networks, are doing what politicians do. The more assiduously and the more imaginatively we court public opinion to find out what we should be doing, the more we follow that opinion. And that is true in network news, it's true in the national politics of this country.

NH: *One of the big complaints about journalism lately is that there is a virus of tabloid news, both in print and in television versions, that has infected the way traditional news broadcasts and TV newsmagazines go about their business. Does that bother you?*

RM: It's awfully easy to sound priggish about this. Look, there is a marketplace, and journalism has always known, at one end of the spectrum, what secret cravings we can latch onto. At the other end it's: "We know what's good for you and we'll tell you." American journalism like British journalism has always known how to exploit that range. The question is: in the frantic desire to maximize audience, is the taste range from the lower end corrupting the upper end? There have been phases, certainly in the print journalism wars, when that was largely true. If you want examples of really undignified American journalism, you've only got to go back to the twenties and thirties where there were many more newspapers in New York and they weren't above any kind of exploitation. So I don't think it's new that American journalism has found ways to follow the crowd and to find the cheaper end of the carnival sideshow with the two-headed woman and the calf that gives birth to a pop singer. That's always been there. What's interesting is that serious journalists are beginning to follow that now.

NH: *The question is whether so much of the American public has really turned so trivial in the information they choose to consume.*

RM: Or have they decided quite sensibly: Look, I'll know where to find the information I need. There's a blizzard of information out there every day. We're surrounded by it. It's like living in a hailstorm in this country all the time. And I'm sure that people rapidly become very sophisticated about what to screen out or where to get shelter from that hail and where to find what they really need to make their lives feel engaged, responsible, comfortable. And

clearly that is different from during the cold war when there was a deep psychic anxiety in this country about communism, about missiles, about nuclear war.

NH: *And what did the television audience bring to television screens during those years?*

RM: A very serious attention and appetite based on anxiety — and on a fairly unified sense of what was right and a sense that the institutions of the country were serving them well. And now we have an extreme loss of faith in the institutions of the democracy. And rampant indifference to the central rite of democracies — elections. The thing that makes democracy work is regular elections. And if, in the world's greatest democracy, increasing proportions of the population say "I don't give a damn about that," that is something really fundamentally sick with the democracy, just by definition. What I'm saying is that the television audience — let's not blame it all on the television networks and the newsmagazines — is now bringing something different to the screen when it watches its television news. Maybe that's partly created by television, but it's mainly created by the whole complex of what it means to be an American in the 1990s.

NH: *This hailstorm you mention is becoming more virulent with the growth of global news via satellite, on-line systems, the Internet, CD-ROMs, and so forth. We're coming into this so-called Information Age, which is raising all sorts of new and as yet unexamined issues. This storm may disorient a lot of people.*

RM: Yes, but out of that hailstorm, will people still want some institution they respect or tolerate, like *The New York Times* or *NBC Nightly News* or *MacNeill/Lehrer*? Do they want them once a day or once a week to pull the world together for them and give them the synthesis that traditionally they relied on and trusted? Obviously some people still want that. A growing number of people, however, clearly do not want or need that. Or they may take that as a little part of their diet as they quickly bolt their cornflakes in the morning, but not as their main information diet. And for younger people, who are demographically not present as they used to be among newspaper readers, television news program watchers, newsmagazine readers, the information superhighway is making it easier and easier for them.

NH: *Another expression we've begun to hear in recent years is "a la carte news," in which a viewer or reader is, by some electronic means, provided only with the news for which he has indicated a prior interest.*

RM: Yes, automat news, cafeteria news. I think

the big divide is going to come with the question: do you want Mr. New York Times Editor to pull the world together for you every day or do you want to say: "New York Times, if you want to continue to exist, you've got to allow me to select what I want from you every day, through my new electronic newspaper." Or, "please Mr. MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, I want that discussion you did with several senators the other day about what Clinton is finally going to do or should do about Bosnia. But also, I want to take another twenty minutes, and I want the background report that your reporter did eighteen months ago on the whole history of the Yugoslav degeneration. I'd like to see that again now." And *whup*, I'll press the button. And there it is.

I'm not at all sure which of those alternatives the great bulk of people are going to settle on. Whether they want to be passively the recipients of a synthesis made by a respected editor in whatever medium — because they want to share that synthesis with their neighbors. After all, readers of *The New York Times* or *Time* magazine share something. They are part of a group that defines itself by what they've all read. Or whether they all want to be much more proactive — ugly term that everybody's using now — and make their own selection. I'll bet there will be large quantities of both, but it will be the puzzle of the purveyors of all this stuff to figure out in what proportions. All this needs to be puzzled out. But the fundamental question in that puzzle is: do people want to be told or do they want to find out for themselves?

NH: *Let's talk about politics for a moment. The 1996 election period has already begun, with candidates trekking to New Hampshire and elsewhere. Looking back to the 1992 model, many office-seekers avoided the traditional journalistic outlets such as Meet the Press and Nightline and the evening news broadcasts in favor of talk radio shows and Larry King and others — thereby avoiding the tough questioning of reporters on the political beat. It was a whole new way of reaching the public by stifling the traditional press.*

RM: Any smart politician is going to use whatever media vehicles are available to him at the time, whether it's Lincoln in 1860 or Lamar Alexander or whoever in 1996. I'm not worried, because the surveys I saw said that when American voters made up their minds in the 1992 election, the vast preponderance of information on which they based their decisions was from traditional media. Now, what the alternative media may have done is attract people who were only marginally interested in the first place, and then bring them into the tent to a point where they might get interested enough to stay. Viewers of Bill Clinton playing the saxo-

phone on *Arsenio Hall* may have said, "Hey, man, there's a cool guy and let's go find out a little more about him."

NH: *You're the only journalist I've met who isn't annoyed by being ignored by many office-seekers in 1992.*

RM: I am not somebody who — at the end of my career in a traditional sort of media — is in any way anxious about politicians resorting to whatever new media they can. Personal information systems, for example, the thing that will use a slightly different bandwidth, where you'll carry a much smaller apparatus with your number on it and you'll be reachable anywhere. I mean, I don't care if politicians find a way to program that, and ring up every individual in the country while you're sailing or horseback riding or in the country, and saying, "Hi, Neil Hickey, this is Bob Dole, and I've heard that you're particularly interested in bowling on Thursday nights, and I just want you and all your fellow bowlers to know that I'm thinking of you, and I'm going to be the best president." I don't care if they use personal satellite systems that can find you in your car or anywhere else. God bless them. The observation I return to is that, in a democracy, if a majority of people don't vote, that is an unhealthy democracy because the mandate that any politician gets is tainted.

NH: *What do you make of the way the press was restricted during the Persian Gulf war, the extremely limited access to military operations that the Pentagon permitted? Every indication is that the public was on the side of the military in the gulf war in approving the strict limitations on news people.*

RM: They were on the side of the military, but if you look at the polls, it's also true that the public approved of the coverage. The military was clearly pissed off at the tone of questioning at some of those news briefings.

NH: *Some of that questioning was quite amateurish.*

RM: Quite amateurish because after all, what does war attract in terms of correspondents. It has always attracted, in addition to the seasoned older people, a new generation of hot young guys, and now gals, who are anxious and brave enough to seek that as an opportunity to make their reputations. And sure they're inexperienced, and sure they ask sometimes inconvenient and sometimes uninformed questions. The military was annoyed by it. But the public didn't mind it. The public approved of the coverage and the public also approved of the Pentagon's restrictions on the coverage. Interesting. The Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press calls this the American pub-

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lic's ability to entertain cognitive dissonance. It can approve of two apparently mutually contradictory things at the same time.

NH: *Let's look at the global picture for a moment. A colossal necklace of geostationary satellites now rings the earth 22,300 miles above the equator and makes it theoretically possible for all the planet's five-and-a-half billion people to have all the same news simultaneously. It's news without national boundaries.*

RM: It's very exciting. It'll come down to how thoroughly the entrepreneurs do their business, how nationalistic the product is, and whether they're driven by the same goddamn feeling that they've got to bring everybody under the same tent at the same time by purveying something that is so gripping and sensational that you have to watch it. Different organizations will broadcast differently.

When television becomes increasingly an a la carte or a cafeteria style service — not the blue plate special we all grew up on — you'll know that out there, at any time of the day, you can watch the BBC from London or the Canadian international service, or the American CNN or Rupert Murdoch or God knows what. It will be part of what we were discussing earlier, the ability of people to choose what they want when. The little keypad that allows you to go out through your cable and get what you want will remember every time you make a selection. It's going to come back at you and say, well, you watched the BBC news this time last night, do you want to see it again. And it will reinforce your habits.

NH: *Your program has been kidded over the years for being populated by "wonks" bloviating endlessly. When it went from thirty minutes to an hour in 1983, one critic said he thought it already was an hour. Somebody once called the NewsHour "gloriously boring."*

RM: It's a description I'll accept. We have the courage to be boring. And nothing is boring to people who are interested in it. The Bible is boring to some people. Schopenhauer is boring to some people, but not to people who are passionately interested in him. What we've created in this program is an audience passionately interested in this program.

NH: *That's a bit solipsistic, isn't it?*

RM: It is. But solipsisms can be true too.

NH: *The interviewing style on MacNeil/Lehrer has always been rather benign by some standards — not at all tough. You don't do "gotcha" questions, you don't try to nail people, you don't engage in loud, argumentative interviewing as do programs like Crossfire and The McLaughlin Group. Has it been a conscious effort to employ*

that style of interviewing?

RM: Yes, and it arises out of Jim's personality and mine because both of us really hate that. For one thing, we think it's phony a lot of the time and we think that smart people see through that. For another, it seems self-defeating to us when the principal ingredient of a news program is going to be the guests you bring on for what they know, and then beat them up, and try to make the audience feel you're smarter than they are. Being there every night, we don't have to reinforce our own presence. We're there all the time. A lot of interviewing is designed to show off the interviewer and not the interviewee. We figure we don't need to do that. For twenty years, we've been there five nights a week. People know who we are. And by our style of questioning they gradually get to know us and what to expect.

NH: *Catching more flies with honey than with vinegar?*

RM: There's the Aesop fable about the competition between the Sun and the North Wind to make the traveller take off his cloak. The North Wind told the Sun "I can do it better than you," and he blew and shrieked and howled and the traveller pulled his cloak more closely around him. And then the Sun came out and shone — and the traveller took off his cloak. Everybody knows that a lot of television interviewing, where the interviewer behaves like Perry Mason with a lying witness in the dock, is just theatrical. The fact that you put on that prosecutorial manner doesn't make your questions better informed, doesn't make you listen better to what the person is saying. In fact it may get in the way of that.

NH: *You must be doing something right because viewership of the program is up by more than a third over the last nine years, which far surpasses the growth of the network evening news programs during that same period. And a recent Roper poll found that 63 percent of the NewsHour's regular audience — about 17 million weekly viewers — consider it more credible than ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN.*

RM: Well, I think in the expanding universe of television news we are a fixed star and the other galaxies, with all their brilliance, are racing away from us. The fireworks may be astonishing, but we are a known quantity that doesn't change. There are some millions of people who like it that way. There are others who've tasted us and found us too dull for their tastes. That's fine. This is always the thing in television. Everybody assumes that you have to win or you're not valid. One of the things public television has shown is you don't have to win to be valid — because it pioneered narrowcasting, which is going to be everybody's future anyway. ♦

MUD

And the Mainstream

When the Respectable Press Chases the *National Enquirer*, What's Going On?

by Andrea Sachs

In the lobby of the *National Enquirer*, there are no Pulitzer Prizes on the wall. In fact, there are few clues that the building, ringed by an overgrown tangle of palm trees, bougainvillea and palmettos, houses a major publishing empire. A few public service awards dot the walls; a cheery receptionist answers the phone, "*National Enquirer* — celebrity or noncelebrity?" Two journalists from *Weekly World News*, a sister publication that is chock-full of extraterrestrials, enter the building bantering about their assignments. "What's your story about?" asks one. "True-life angel encounters," the other replies. "Oh," says the first, "you can do that from clips."

The nature of the *National Enquirer*, its renegade spirit as well as its quirky charm, creep up on one slowly. The *Enquirer* headquarters — which also houses *Country Weekly*, *Soap Opera Magazine*, and the *Weekly World News* — looks like a small school. Tucked away on a quiet

residential street in Lantana, Florida, a sleepy blue-collar town, and flanked by a baseball field and a water tower, the modest complex is easy to miss. But from inside, the *Enquirer* can seem as otherworldly as the dreamy pastel architecture of Lantana, a cult-like enterprise that produces one of the most widely read publications in America.

With an enviable circulation that approaches 3.5 million copies a week, the *Enquirer* is still a pariah publication. Doubt it? Imagine dropping a copy on the table at a business meeting or taking the latest issue out of your briefcase on the Washington shuttle. But increasingly in recent years, the *Enquirer* has won grudging respect from its mainstream rivals for the thoroughness and accuracy, if not always the taste and fairness, of its coverage of the *Enquirer*'s kind of hard-news story. And increasingly, the *Enquirer*'s kind has become the mainstream's kind — Gary Hart, William Kennedy Smith and the woman who accused him of rape, Gennifer Flowers, Michael Jackson, Tonya Harding (see sidebar, page 38), and most spectacularly, O.J.

Simpson. Supermarket tabloids and their broadcast cousins, David Broder wrote scathingly in *The Washington Post* last year, "have demonstrated the capacity to 'launch' stories — often of the sleaziest kind — that the mainstream press feels it necessary to follow." The white Bronco blazed a trail where high culture and low culture meet, and the *Enquirer* is thriving in that atmosphere, thank you very much.

It didn't hurt that the Simpson story fell smack in the middle of the *Enquirer* source network. The *Enquirer* was one of the few publications in the United States to cover O.J.'s marital problems, particularly his 1989 arrest for wife-beating. The now famous 911 phone call by Nicole may be a surprise to the rest of the reading public, but to *Enquirer* readers who picked up the February 21, 1989, issue, it is old news. When the murders were discovered in Brentwood last June, the *Enquirer*'s reporters arrived on the scene before the coroner. Since then, the *Enquirer* has had as many as twenty reporters on the story at a time. By the time the Simpson trial started in January,

Sachs is the law reporter at Time magazine.

'We haven't changed...

twenty-four of the *Enquirer's* last thirty-two covers had featured the case, from every possible angle: O.J. FINALLY CRACKS; I SAW O.J. AT MURDER SCENE; NICOLE'S SECRET LIFE. The publication had also put forth its purest tabloid prose in service of the story: "The night ended with the bubbly blonde beauty dead in a river of blood on her front doorstep — her throat slashed, her body bludgeoned, her face battered and bruised."

As the trial began, the biggest secret in the Los Angeles County Courthouse wasn't O.J.'s guilt or innocence, but the fact that so many reporters were reading the *National Enquirer* religiously. As Carl Lavin, an editor sent to Los Angeles to coordinate *The New York Times's* coverage, wrote in his paper's house organ, "I knew this was a different sort of story when I found myself reading the *National Enquirer* — and assigning reporters to chase leads from it." But for the public, that didn't become clear until David Margolick, covering the trial for the *Times*, twice cited the *Enquirer's* story saying that Simpson had been overheard yelling, "I did it!" during a confessional jailhouse meeting with his minister and friend, Roosevelt Grier. A sheriff's deputy had been barred from using the quoted words in his testimony about the exchange. Margolick did use them, and despite his unquestioned reputation as an ace legal correspondent, a major debate arose among journalism pundits, from the pages of *The Washington Post* to *The Today Show*. "To cite the *National Enquirer* as his only source is, I think, dead wrong," declared Marvin Kalb, director of the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, in a discussion on CNN's *Crossfire*.

Margolick stuck to his guns. "I

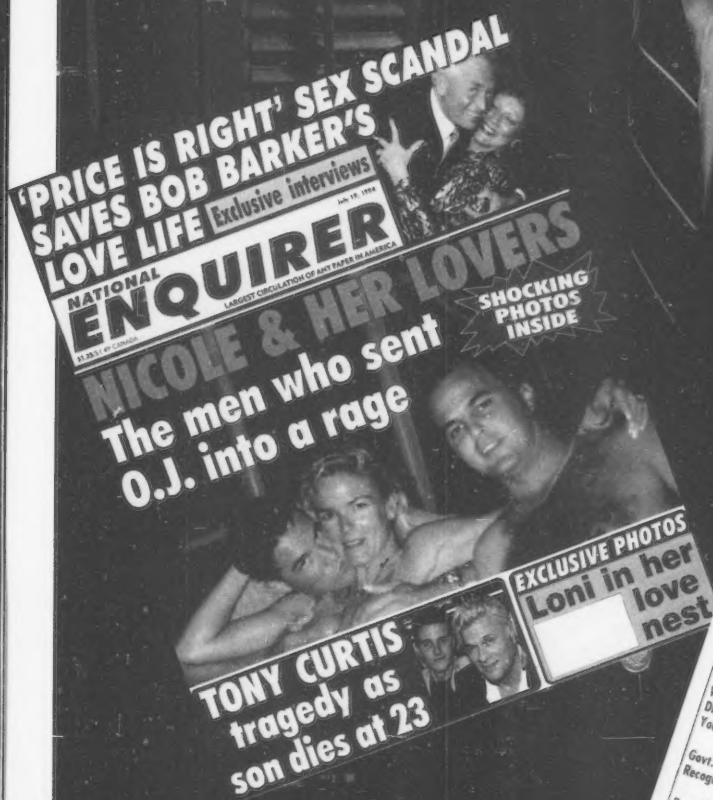
didn't do it lightly, and I thought I'd be criticized for it," he told *The Washington Post*. "It was from a source [the *Enquirer*] that had proven itself reliable in the Simpson case, and I'd be doing my readers a disservice if I didn't mention it." A *Times* article on the hullabaloo quoted the paper's executive editor, Joseph Lelyveld, in defense of Margolick on the ground of relevance: "He was trying to make plain to readers what was going on in the courtroom." (The *Times*, Lelyveld added, was "not subcontracting our editorial judgment in the Simpson case to a supermarket tabloid.") In the same article, Jon Katz, a media critic who writes for *New York* and *Wired* magazines, was quoted as saying the *Enquirer's* coverage of the Simpson case was better than many of its competitors' and that the *Times* would have been guilty of "head-in-the-sand myopia" not to have cited the tabloid.

In the Lantana newsroom, where praise from fellow journalists has been rare, there's a polite gratitude to Margolick, but a surprising lack of interest. After all, if *Enquirer* employees depended on praise from the mainstream press, they would have starved long ago. Those who think about it tend to see it as their due. "When the mainstream media are working alongside of us, they see these stories are accurate," says *Enquirer* editor-in-chief Iain Calder in his soft Scottish burr. Since the Margolick episode, the press has begun to train its lights on the *Enquirer* itself, with as many as four TV crews a day seeking admission to the newsroom. But the *Enquirer's* staff still has a wariness of the rest of the media, born of its geographic isolation from the media capitals and years of rejection. Says Valerie Virga, the photo editor, "I used to get a lot of this," making a cross with her fingers, "Get thee behind me,

tabloid person." But times are different. "We haven't changed. The rest of the press has changed. They're becoming more tabloid."

A melding of mainstream culture and *Enquirer* culture has been in the cards ever since the *Enquirer* helped end Gary Hart's political career by publishing a photo of a beaming (and married) Hart with Donna Rice perched on his knee. "The *National Enquirer* earned its spurs with the Gary Hart story," says Everette Dennis, executive director of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University. "It established them in a new way. The fact that it happened made it more acceptable for mainstream publications to look at the *National Enquirer* as a lead for news." The Gary Hart cover now hangs proudly on a wall in Lantana, right next to a cover of Elvis lying in his open copper coffin at Graceland. The Elvis cover occupies a special place in *Enquirer* hearts; it was the top issue of all time, selling a staggering six and a half million copies.

The gulf between the *Enquirer* and the mainstream press can't be detected by a look at the newsroom, which resembles that of any good-size newspaper. Reporters hunch over their IBM and Mac terminals, their desks buried under stacks of newspapers. As much as the newsroom may look like theirs, though, many in the mainstream press dismiss the *National Enquirer* as being without journalistic ethics. But it's not a lack of ethics, *Enquirer* people say, it's different ethics, to which they profess stubborn devotion. High among the principles in the *Enquirer* newsroom is tenacity. Staff members are used to getting doors slammed in their faces. "We'll put five people on the story and knock on a thousand



Editor-in-chief

Iain Calder:

"We'll put five people on the story and knock on a thousand doors."

...The rest of the press is



Photo editor Valerie Virga:
"Small cameras, big balls.
That counts for a lot in this business."

doors," says editor-in-chief Calder proudly. "We're willing to go to greater lengths." Sometimes it's for stories that hardly seem worth it; ask, and you'll hear tales of tracking Roseanne and her amorous bodyguard through Europe. But the staff's drive is legendary. "If there's a big story, we jump all over it," says editor John Cathcart. "We'll use Lear jets, and twenty reporters hiding in the bushes. We've even talked about using submarines."

Another *Enquirer* ethos is a focus on the reader, to a degree unusual in newsrooms. One hears no scorn for the Kmart and Wal-Mart shoppers who have contributed to the paper's success; any disdain is saved for the non-paying browser who reads the latest issue in the checkout line. The attitude is best summed up by a handmade sign in the newsroom that reads: IT'S THE READER, STUPID. It is a devotion that is reciprocated by the *Enquirer*'s readers. They send the publication about a million letters a year, so many that the *Enquirer* has been given its own zip code — 33464. Because the *Enquirer* sells few subscriptions — there are only 500,000 subscribers — there is a sense on the staff that it con-

stantly has to reinvent the wheel. "This is almost the purest form of democracy," says Calder. "Every single week, people are voting with their pocket-books." That explains the *Enquirer*'s story selection process, and why, for example, it bothered with a Beltway type like Gary Hart. "It wasn't a political story," says Calder. "He went over the line." The line of impropriety? No, Calder answers. "The line where fifty percent of the population wants to read about someone. A critical mass." The hottest, the newest, the trendy people who obsess mainstream publications mean little to the *Enquirer*. "We don't give a fuck if you're up and coming," explains one veteran staff member helpfully. "We care about you if you're there."

But it is another ethos at the *National Enquirer* — its willingness to pay for stories — that most perpetuates its ostracism from mainstream journalism. In the Simpson case, for example, the paper paid José Camacho and his cutlery-store bosses \$12,500 for their story of selling O.J. a knife, and Nicole's maid \$18,000 for her description of O.J.'s abuse of Nicole. One result is a new California law barring witnesses and jurors in criminal cases from selling their stories before a case is ended. Despite the public criticism, *Enquirer* people stand by their practice, which is deeply embedded in the *Enquirer* psyche. "We check our stories out whether we pay or not," says Calder. "You're buying the exclusivity."

David Perel, the editor in charge of the paper's O.J. coverage, agrees. "Money is a very powerful tool that we use to get to the truth," he says. Learning how to price a story is part of one's journalistic repertoire. "You get a sense of what a story is worth when you've been here awhile."

The sense of free-flowing dollars is everywhere in the *Enquirer* newsroom. When asked how much he pays for items for his column, Mike Walker, the

Enquirer's longtime gossip columnist, answers, "How high is up?" The usual range, he says, is \$100 to \$400 an item. He says of would-be sources, "When I get a call — and I get them every day — once I decide they really have something, I ask, 'Why are you telling me this story?' When they say money, I get a little warm glow. Greed is a very pervasive and very understandable part of human nature. It is much easier to deal with a greedy person than someone who is motivated by hate or revenge."

Such talk makes most mainstream journalists furious. Marvin Kalb calls the *Enquirer*'s practice of paying for stories "part of the prostitution of American journalism." He is particularly offended by the notion that the tabloid is paying for exclusives, not for stories. "I was raised in an era where an exclusive was the result of the legwork you did to get special information," he says. "This kind of exclusive is simply a reflection of the fatness of your wallet." But there are defenders of the practice outside of the Lantana newsroom. John Tierney, a *New York Times* reporter, wrote in the *Times* magazine: "I don't believe that paying sources is unethical, as long as it's disclosed to the reader; in some cases I think it makes for better journalism. It gives a fair share of the profits to sources who spend time and take risks. It might promote some fictional tales, but it would also elicit stories that otherwise wouldn't be told, from the many people who now see no good reason to talk to a reporter." The *Times*'s policy is not to pay for information; the *Enquirer*'s is to pay when necessary.

There's money, money everywhere at the *Enquirer*, including a \$16 million annual editorial budget. Experienced reporters earn from \$55,000 to almost \$100,000. Editor-in-chief Calder, fifty-six, who has

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY NATIONAL ENQUIRER

becoming more tabloid.'

been working as a journalist since he graduated from high school in Scotland, made millions when the tabloid was sold to its present owner, McFadden Holdings, for \$412.5 million in 1989 after the death of the *Enquirer's* legendary founder, Generoso Pope Jr. Pope bought the paper in 1952 for \$75,000, and turned it from a New York newspaper into a successful national tabloid, with Calder's help in the later years.

The *Enquirer* also shells out big money for photographs. "No one can ever beat us," boasts Virga, the photo editor. "We've sent out checks from \$50 to \$50,000 and more from time to time. We're bidding against *Time* and *Newsweek* and *People*." If the story warrants it, the tabloid spares no expense; at Elizabeth Taylor's last wedding, the *Enquirer* had half a dozen photographers and three helicopters in motion. Are there limits to what they'll do for a good photo? "I wouldn't break into someone's hospital room," says Virga. "Despite what people feel, we don't invade privacy."

Eddie Murphy and others might take issue with that claim. The *Enquirer* got photos of Murphy's wedding by sending in photographers dressed as waiters. Such feats take "small cameras, big balls," Virga says with a sly smile, adding, "That counts for a lot in this business." Getting pictures of O.J. Simpson has been easier. At one point, says Virga, "we were getting thirty to fifty calls a day" from people saying, "I photographed O.J. playing football." It was insane. It's like you're the FBI. You have to screen them." But like most of her colleagues, Virga, who came to the publication almost eighteen years ago bearing an English

degree from Boston College, wouldn't give up the chase for anything. "I can't imagine working somewhere where everyone is cooperative, like *Vanity Fair*. What do they do all day?"

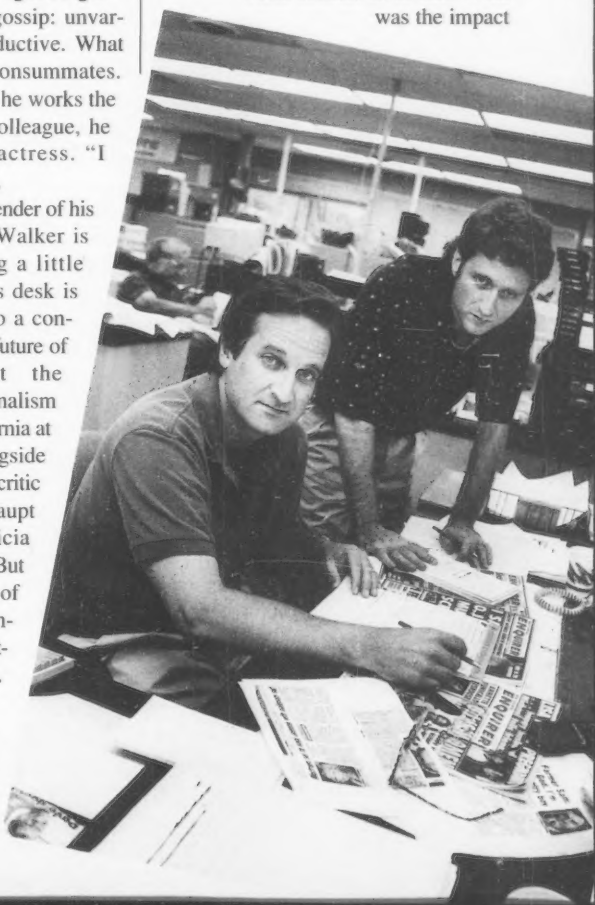
If anyone has benefited from the growing cachet of the *Enquirer*, it is Mike Walker. The silver-haired gossip columnist is a one-man industry; he is a regular guest on the *Geraldo* show and the E! Channel and has his own syndicated radio show on the Westwood One Network. He is also the co-author of Faye Resnick's sizzling best-selling memoir, *Nicole Brown Simpson: The Private Diary of a Life Interrupted*.

"We are broadcasting from atop Mount Gossip," he coos into his microphone in his Lantana radio studio. "Let's get a little frothier. You know that I like to get lightweight." Walker is the voice of gossip: unvarnished, unapologetic, seductive. What others just play at, he consummates. Between radio segments, he works the phone. Talking with a colleague, he names a well-known actress. "I smell facelift," he smirks.

Apugnacious defender of his tabloid craft, Walker is finally getting a little respect. On his desk is an invitation to a conference on the future of biography at the Graduate School of Journalism of the University of California at Berkeley, to appear alongside the *New York Times* book critic Christopher Lehmann-Haupt and the biographer Patricia Bosworth, among others. But he can't shake his sense of grievance about the mainstream press. "I'm a profit-monger," he proclaims.

"I'm a journalist. I sell and trade information, and any journalist who doesn't think that's what he does is kidding himself." A high-school dropout from Plymouth, Massachusetts, whose career before the *Enquirer* was, by his own account, a mix of wire services, newspapers, police reporting, and managing rock and roll bands in Europe, Walker has been at the paper since 1971. As he tells his radio audience, "I used to be a serious journalist. Then I saw the light."

It was an item written by Walker that got the *Enquirer* into its most famous debacle. A Los Angeles jury awarded the actress Carol Burnett a \$1.6 million verdict in 1981 after the tabloid implied that Burnett had made a drunken scene in a Washington, D.C. restaurant. Even though the verdict was later halved, it sent a chill through the whole publishing world because of its size. What was the impact



General editor David Perel, right, shown with assistant executive editor Steve Coz: "Money is a very powerful tool that we use to get to the truth."

My Twenty-Four Days on the Slippery Slope

by Jane Meredith Adams

of the Carol Burnett verdict on the tabloid? Says a lawyer who once represented the *Enquirer*, "My opinion before the Burnett decision was that they were very careful. Afterwards, they were a little more careful." Now, a lawyer from the prestigious law firm of Williams & Connolly flies down from Washington weekly to review stories being published that week.

If the *Enquirer* is edging toward respectability, it is due in large part to younger journalists like general editor David Perel and assistant executive editor Steve Coz, his boss. The two might be considered the Woodward and Bernstein of tabloid journalism for their successful collaboration on the O.J. Simpson case. (As it happens, Perel started his career at *The Washington Post*, as a makeup editor.) The two editors have clearly brought a drive, energy, and accuracy that the *Enquirer* hasn't always enjoyed. Unlike *Enquirer* reporters from an earlier era, who were often European-born Fleet Street veterans, both are American and college-educated. Perel, thirty-five, a dead ringer for Sean Penn, went to school at the University of Maryland and American University. Coz, thirty-seven, the picture of yuppie sophistication in his Ralph Lauren Polo shirt and his tortoise-shell glasses, graduated cum laude from Harvard. Their smarts and hustle would be a credit to any newsroom; still, the two are wedded to the *Enquirer* life-style, in large part because of what Perel calls "the fun factor." (Coz is also wedded to Valerie Virga, the photo editor, whom he met on the job.)

In the end, the *Enquirer* is more like mainstream publications than many in journalism think — but less like a major newspaper than *Enquirer* journalists like to think. Too many mainstream journalists consider the tabloid's work "cash for trash," as *The New Yorker* put it in an article last year.

And what will the *Enquirer* do when the O.J. case is over? Not to worry — there's always another scandal down the road. Photo editor Virga, for one, has her eye on the Speaker of the House. "I'd love to catch him doing the nasty — Newt with some little bimbo on his lap." After all, inquiring minds want to know. ♦

Last January, a year after the name Tonya Harding first surfaced in connection with a plot to attack the skater Nancy Kerrigan, I was walking in San Francisco with friends, hashing over the O.J. Simpson murder trial. Seven months into the story, the case still entranced us beyond reason. Midway into savoring the news that *Dog World* had assigned a reporter to the trial because of interest in Nicole Brown Simpson's Akita, Kato, my gaze caught the marquee of Big Al's adult book store. In black letters on white was the name Tonya Harding, last year's media obsession, paired with the name of another who found media fame in 1994, both now sunk to their level in a poorly spelled advertisement for pornographic videos:

JOHN W. BOBBITT

TONYA HARDING

GIVE THEY'RE XXX ALL

"Oh, Tonya," I said, and my friends laughed, and the conversation turned back to O.J.-land. But for a minute or two I dropped out. With the release of the "Tonya and Jeff's Wedding Night" video by her ex-husband, Jeff Gillooly, Harding seemed more ridiculous than ever; in many ways, her story had seemed ridiculous then. So what did that make me?

For twenty-four days I had tracked Tonya Harding for *The Boston Globe* as she moved from an obscure figure skater who could perform a stunning triple axel to a criminal defendant accused of involvement in a plot to whack Kerrigan in the knee and eliminate her from Olympic contention. I stood in the clump of reporters at the edge of the Clackamas Town Center

rink as Harding practiced; I waited, shivering, at the end of her driveway, hoping she'd drive by and throw out a quote. I participated, in other words, in the kind of bottom-feeding journalism ridiculed — even as we in the "mainstream" do more of it — by virtually everyone: the subjects of the stories, the public, and other reporters, including myself.

I now watch the reporters chasing the Simpson story with pity as well as envy — pity for the ordeal, envy of the big story. I have felt the group hysteria at the chance of missing a tidbit. I have experienced how it is possible to begin reporting a story with a sense of the larger issues involved and after weeks of pointless stakeouts, rude brushoffs, and tabloid scoops to greet almost every development with a snicker.

Looking back I wish I could say I would do it differently next time. I'd be calmer, I'd stay above the fray, I'd insist on substance. But I'm not sure it would be possible.

It was January and February 1994. O.J. Simpson had not yet murdered or not murdered his ex-wife and her friend, and Michael Jackson had not married (much less split up with) Lisa Marie Presley. The trial of Lorena Bobbitt for cutting off her husband's penis with a kitchen knife was under way. And in Portland, Oregon, where the skies were nickel-gray and often rainy, we were deep into the gathering of information about a morally ambiguous skater who had rocked the established order of the Olympic Games. Across the country, the attraction-revulsion dynamic was going full-tilt: an attraction to the details of these quasi-celebrity stories, followed by a queasy sense of revulsion. Who wouldn't want to know that Tonya Harding's mother had been ejected

Adams, a former staff reporter for The Boston Globe, is now a West Coast correspondent for the paper and a free-lance writer.

from a skating rink for directing a stream of obscenities at her daughter as she practiced? Or that she had forbidden six-year-old Tonya to leave the ice to go to the bathroom, so she'd peed on the rink? I relished these facts; I'd chased them down. To justify intruding into someone's life, I told myself what reporters always tell themselves: the stories involved "the public's right to know."

In the Harding case, there were indeed legitimate questions: Did Harding know of the plot to attack Kerrigan, who was all that Harding would never be — long-legged and richly marketable? Had Harding violated the Olympic code of ethics? Should she be allowed to skate in the games? The fifty or seventy-five or one hundred reporters who descended on Portland and took up residence at the Marriott or the Benson or the Heathman pursued those stories as long as they could. But then a void arose. It would be March, well after the Olympics (in which she took part, badly) before any charges were filed against Harding; the lawyers, meanwhile, were mostly mum, and so the focus shifted to her personal exploits. We began to chronicle the life of an abused and possibly criminal young skater. The problem was, almost no one had access to Harding, who was keenly aware that her words were a salable commodity. For the most part, she did not talk to anyone who did not pay her cash or cash-equivalent or offer prime-time exposure. Those were her rules. It must have been satisfying to her to wield such power.

In more innocent times, under the rules of the media game, a tough-talking, Marlboro-smoking skater with a tenth-grade education would spill her story to whoever got there first, or asked in the most empathic tones, or worked for the most prestigious news organization. She would open her life to us, flattered that we'd asked. Not Tonya; not in the 1990s. With the help of her lawyers, she sold her story, for a fee well into six figures, to the tabloid television show *Inside Edition*; she gave an on-ice interview to Diane Sawyer that was more like a photo op with a cap-

tion; and she gave a vague, tearful interview to Connie Chung of CBS, the official Winter Olympics television network. Most of the rest of us were left on our own.

Not by and large reporters who had covered celebrities of any caliber, we were mentally ill-equipped for the meaninglessness of our assignment, some of which I tried to inject into my daily dispatches to Boston: *Tonya's mother collapses on afternoon television talk show; Portland radio station plays Hang Down Your Head Gillooly; the wrestler Playboy Buddy Rose in leopard-print pants appears at ring-side, wants to be Tonya's bodyguard.*

Sometime during this period I began to clean out the supply of little bottles of lotion and shampoo from the wicker basket by the sink in my hotel room. Every day I used some or just smelled the more aromatic ones, then loaded them into my suitcase. Every day the maid put out new bottles. What did she care? She'd undoubtedly seen worse. Then one night I took nine small bottles from the health club at the Benson. Can never have too much of the stuff, I thought, but I knew, the way a drunk person will know, that I was drunk, that I had crossed the line, had become sucked into the driving ethos of this story: insatiability, the endless, sometimes pointless quest for more.

No piece of information was too trivial. No effort too ridiculous. For most of us it's a foolish feeling, standing outside someone's house — unless the person shows up. One Saturday night a reporter for *USA Today* and one for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* were rewarded for being outside Harding's father's apartment. When I heard they'd managed a brief conversation with Harding, who was heading out in tight jeans to party, I felt remiss for not joining their vigil.

By then I'd already endured the embarrassing experience of slipping in alongside a crowd of ten-year-olds at Harding's rink so I could get into the free skate, in the hopes that Harding's coach would speak to me (she wouldn't). And I'd spent one chilly evening sitting in a rented car while a colleague looked in the windows of the cheaply built A-frame

where Harding and Gillooly lived (trespassing by anyone's definition).

"I see some skates," she'd said, her nose at the glass. When she lifted up the lid on the garbage can, I said, "Will you get in this car!" and reluctantly she did.

Perhaps the most fruitless experience was the eight hours about thirty-five of us spent in the lobby of the Portland headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, waiting for Harding to emerge from questioning. By the time Harding walked out of the elevator after 11 P.M., it was past deadline for most of us, and the lobby reeked of sweat and leftover pizza; but we'd stayed on, numbed. Suddenly, there she was: blond-haired, shorter than I'd realized. She stood mute while her lawyer, Robert Weaver, explained that she had nothing to say. That seemed to fuel the hysteria. When Harding and Weaver turned to exit, in herd formation we followed out the lobby and into the parking garage. One cameraman fell, hard, face-forward on the cement steps behind me; the herd kept moving. Finally Harding said yes, she had a message to her fans: "Please believe in me!" We jotted that down. She slipped into her lawyer's red BMW. Weaver opened the door on the driver's side. For a moment we had them surrounded. We glared at them. They glared back.

In my hotel room, weary, I threw the little bottles into my suitcase.

Now, Harding mania has been eclipsed by Simpson mania, and my supply of hotel freebies has shrunk to seven bottles. The other night I sliced open the piece of paper on a bottle of Marriott lotion, unscrewed the top, and one whiff brought back the Harding siege — the long drives to the Clackamas Town Center, the thinly carpeted floor at FBI headquarters. I remembered a television tabloid reporter I'd sat beside in court, his face coated with heavy orange pancake makeup at 10 A.M. He seemed to me now no more desperate than the rest of us, just more naked in his ambition. I started to shake out the sickly-sweet-smelling lotion and then thought, I don't have to do this. ♦

Environmental Journalism in an Age of Backlash

by Kevin Carmody

It's a

Earth Day 1990 marked the height of amateur hour in environmental reporting. Responding to America's rekindled concern about the Earth, newspapers churned out special sections and broadcasters produced countless segments marking the event's twentieth anniversary. In many cases, journalists unfamiliar with the complex underlying issues were drafted to help crank out copy, and in the rush to extol the wonders of recycling and call attention to planetary health, journalistic skepticism and scientific accuracy were too frequently sidelined.

Now the pendulum is swinging fast toward the opposite extreme; as Earth Day 1995 (April 22) approached, upbeat articles in *The Economist* and *The New Yorker* took pokes at those environmentalists, as *The Economist* put it, whose "efforts to scare the world over global warming seem not to have worked." The *New Yorker* piece, by the veteran *Newsweek* writer Gregg Easterbrook, embraced conservation measures, but other journalists are trumpeting the views of a loose network of anti-environmentalist "citizens" groups. While attracting people who genuinely believe American life is over-regulated, many of them are fronts for industrial polluters or have ties to radical-right organizations, including the John Birch Society and antigovernment militias. In Washington, part of Newt Gingrich's "contract with America" is a series of bills that would virtually halt federal action to protect the environment. It is becoming trendy to ask whether environmental laws, not polluters, are the real

public enemy. In newsrooms throughout the country, the hot story is the "high cost of environmental regulation," not the people or resources harmed when that regulation fails.

"Five years ago, environmental issues were subjected to far too little skepticism in the press," says Timothy Noah, who reports from Washington for *The Wall Street Journal*. "Journalists were faddish and unthinking in their coverage of some stories. Now there is a faddish, unthinking knee-jerk reaction in the other direction. The truth is in neither extreme."

And indeed there are scores of veteran journalists, most at daily newspapers, who have covered the environment for years without embracing the extremes and continue to do so. Most vulnerable to the shifting winds are national news organizations, whose approach tends to be broad-brush coverage by nonspecialist reporters, and general-assignment reporters elsewhere. It was the same segment of the media — often sequestered inside the Washington Beltway or assigned to cover the latest trendy issue — that most enthusiastically churned out environmental puff pieces in the months leading up to Earth Day 1990.

By 1994, the *Los Angeles Times*, ABC News, and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, among others, were taking the iconoclastic position that Americans were being unnecessarily frightened about everything from street crime to pollution by the media themselves. The angle was that journalists had scared average Americans about "minor risks," like pesticide residues on foods, while often under-reporting major health factors like diet and alcohol consumption. ABC's John Stossel, a longtime consumer and environment reporter who has become a high-profile media revisionist on the environment, delivered a special report entitled "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" that attracted more than 16 million viewers last spring. The *Los Angeles Times* devoted seven full pages on September 12, 13, and 14 to the media critic David Shaw's "Living Scared: Why Do the Media Make Life Seem so Risky?" which asked, among

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Out Th

Jungle

other things, how Americans could be so frightened about dying prematurely when we are living longer.

Stossel has gone on to advocate the elimination of some government regulatory agencies, saying in speeches to industry groups that the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and others make life more dangerous "because they interfere with the market." That approach has endeared him to free-market conservatives and made him a star on the lecture circuit, able to command speaking fees of \$20,000 or more.

Stossel says that during his years as a consumer reporter he sounded plenty of alarms about environmental hazards he now thinks were bogus. Thus he feels that contrarian stories like the ones he's now doing are long overdue and are necessary to help Americans put life back into perspective.

As for Shaw, parts of his series offer some lessons on the pitfalls of reporting an unfamiliar issue. In support of one of the series' central tenets — that environmental pollutants aren't the health problem they are popularly believed to be — Shaw cited data from the National Cancer Institute, a federal agency that sometimes co-sponsors research with private corporations, showing that the age-adjusted mortality rate for all cancers except lung cancer has been declining since 1950 for Americans younger than eighty-five. That is an accurate statistic, so far as it goes, and is often cited by industry scientists and others who think environmental concerns are exaggerated. But it does not take into account that the number of people who *get* cancer and the number of people who *die* from cancer are two different matters. The increasing effectiveness of treatments for some types of cancer might lower the overall mortality rate, while at the same time a greater percentage of people get the disease. And that is in fact the case for non-lung cancers, according to a number of published studies. Mentioning only mortality data tells only half the story. Another frequently cited statistic is the steady increase in U.S.

life expectancy. Much of that increase is due to a dramatic drop in infant mortality, not health improvements in the adult population, as the author David Steinman noted in a critique of Shaw's series published in the weekly *L.A. Village View*.

UPWARD FROM CORRUPTION

The contrarian phenomenon may have its roots in the Reagan years, when bureaucrats such as Interior Secretary James Watt and EPA Administrator Anne Gorsuch Burford were assigned to dismantle their own programs. It was a time when Dow Chemical lobbyists were allowed by political appointees to help write EPA news releases, recalls Keith Schneider of *The New York Times* (who has himself come under fire as a "contrarian" reporter). It was also a time of greed and corruption — more than twenty EPA political appointees eventually resigned in disgrace and assistant administrator Rita Lavelle was sentenced to six months in prison for lying to Congress. The understandable reaction built to the point that in 1988 George Bush pledged to be the "environmental president." And it prompted the resurrection of Earth Day in time for its twentieth anniversary in 1990, with its attendant journalistic excesses.

the current revisionist reporting trend began as a few disparate voices, including a number of serious environmental journalists, asking tough questions about the effectiveness of the nation's environmental laws. Among them, Schneider of the *Times* reported in August 1991 on the debate about the dangers of dioxin — the toxic, chlorine-based chemical that prompted the 1982 evacuation of Times Beach, Missouri — and suggest-

ere

ed that dioxin wasn't so dangerous after all. Schneider was also the primary reporter on a five-part series in March 1993 entitled "What Price Cleanup?" which explored whether the nation's mechanism for regulating environmental health threats like dioxin had gone awry. Schneider's coverage touched off a professional argument in which he was generally praised for asking important questions, but criticized for proffering a number of unsupported conclusions, especially the notion that the bulk of regulations on toxic chemicals are an unnecessary drain on the nation's productivity. An article by Vicki Monks in the *American Journalism Review* in June 1993, examining dioxin coverage, declared that "Schneider's conclusions about dioxin's risks have a major flaw: they're wrong." Soon thereafter, Robert Boyle, a writer on the outdoors and environment issues for *Sports Illustrated*, also took Schneider to task, noting several errors in his series. For example, Schneider said at one point that "there is no acid rain in South Carolina." But there is, as the *Times* later acknowledged in a correction.

Boyle also noted "questionable reporting" by Boyce Rensberger of *The Washington Post*. In an April 15, 1993, article, Rensberger seemed to suggest that ozone depletion was no longer something to worry about. The American Chemical Society promptly issued a news release challenging Rensberger's conclusions, and a former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science rebutted him publicly. A few months later, Boyle wrote, a Rensberger article about global warming "both misrepresented the views of James Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and gave prominence to the views of Patrick Michaels, an associate professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia, without identifying Michaels as editor of *World Climate*, a quarterly funded by the Western Fuels Association, a consortium of coal interests."

At a conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists in the fall of 1993, Schneider defended his work by saying journalists have given environmental groups a free ride for too long, so he was practicing a more advanced, skeptical form of environmental journalism. At the same forum, Rensberger insisted that as a science writer he belonged to a more mature, skeptical branch of the profession than mere environmental reporting. The environment beat, he said, had a "tradition" of giving "an unquestioning alarmist spin to the story."

WRANGLING OVER DIOXIN

One reason Schneider's reports in particular seem to have roiled so many colleagues is that *The New York Times* has so much influence over public policy and with the nation's opinion leaders, including the rest of the media. The Schneider articles published from 1991 through 1993 were mostly accurate, judged fact by fact, but they led readers to conclusions that were, in truth, highly debatable. A notable

example, repeated in the media far and wide, was the incorrect impression that dioxin would soon be pronounced innocent by the EPA. Newspaper editorials bemoaned the money "wasted" on dioxin cleanups. News reports plagiarized (and exaggerated) Schneider's conclusions. Things that started as the opinions of a few sources became widely accepted as fact.

To name one: Exposure to dioxin, Schneider wrote in August 1991, "is now considered by some experts to be no more risky than spending a week sunbathing." That analogy was widely re-reported elsewhere, almost always as evidence that dioxin wasn't very dangerous. (It was also commonly described as a consensus of government scientists, but Schneider says it was primarily the opinion of one source, the late Vernon Houk of the Centers for Disease Control, who later repudiated it as misleading. Schneider says that he doesn't know why Houk changed his mind, and that he can't be responsible for what other news outlets did with the axiom about sunbathing.)

Then, last September, the EPA released its draft reassessment of dioxin. Far from clearing the chemical as a health threat, it affirmed that dioxin is a probable human carcinogen and that it also shows troubling reproductive effects. Schneider reported the EPA's conclusions for the *Times*. Afterward, he said he remained comfortable with the sunbathing analogy. "Sunbathing is not a trivial source of cancer," he said, pointing to statistics for skin cancer, including the fact that "it was the second-fastest growing type of cancer in whites in the early eighties." As for his overall coverage of dioxin, he says it was "right on the mark," because the EPA concluded that dioxin was neither as dangerous nor as harmless as extreme positions would have it.

'WISE USE' ON THE MARCH

As public debate about the environment has lurched to the right in the last eighteen months, the spotlight for environment reporters has shifted far from Schneider and Rensberger; their most provocative pieces seem tame compared to the pronouncements and goals of Newt Gingrich and his followers, and to some current reporting full of flawed anecdotes about supposed environmental overkill (see sidebar, page 44). Revisionist wisdom has gained broad ascendancy. It holds that environmentalists had their way in Congress too long, hence the perceived regulatory excesses. It is true that environmentalists enjoyed legislative victories in Congress during the late 1980s and early 1990s, partly as a reaction against the abuses and corruption of the Reagan era. But the revival didn't last; during 1994, all but one of eleven environmental bills, including reform measures that would have eased regulations, died in Congress. "Republican obstructionism" got much of the blame in the mainstream press, not all of it deserved. The anti-environmentalist movement was more than willing to take credit.

Known alternatively as the Wise Use or property-rights

movement, the loosely organized network of groups purports to be a populist uprising that defends the interests of the little guys against the evil government eco-bureaucracy out to steal their land or their jobs under the guise of saving some bug or swamp. In reality, such organizations in the East are most likely to be financed by land developers and industry trade groups, and they sometimes adopt green-sounding names such as the National Wetlands Coalition. That one is made up mainly of oil drillers, developers, and natural gas companies that want federal wetlands policy rewritten to favor their industries. In the West, most support tends to come from mining, timber, and cattle interests seeking to protect their low-cost use of public lands, and the groups are usually fairly open about those goals. Real people with legitimate grievances do belong to such groups, but close examination of their records has shown that the membership rolls are often dominated by employees of regulated industries, antigovernment ideologues in search of a cause, even people recruited by public relations firms that, according to an article in last May's *Consumer Reports*, "earn as much as \$500 for every citizen they mobilize for a corporate client's cause."

Conservative think tanks and talk radio help disseminate the message. But Ron Arnold and his boss Alan Gottlieb, based in Bellevue, Washington, have given Wise Use its identity and direction. Gottlieb, a direct-mail expert who claims credit for identifying "Reagan Democrats," raised tens of millions of dollars for Republican presidential campaigns. He also runs the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise and two pro-gun organizations, the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms and the Second Amendment Foundation. Arnold, whom the New Right strategist Paul Weyrich hired to write a subsidized biography of James Watt, hooked up with Gottlieb in 1984 when each was trying to identify a new conservative cause to promote. Arnold suggested targeting "runaway environmentalism," according to David Helvarg, author of the recent book *The War Against the Greens*. And as Gottlieb told Helvarg: "I've never seen anything pay out so quickly as this whole Wise Use thing has done. What's really good about it is it touches the same kind of anger as the gun stuff, and not only generates a higher rate of return, but also a higher average dollar donation" — \$18 versus \$40. They got plenty of help painting the Greens as closet Reds. The John Birch Society, with ties to sometimes violent anti-environmentalist organizations in the Adirondacks, pronounced Earth Day a veiled attempt to celebrate Lenin's birthday. Even George Will described

environmentalism as "a green tree with red roots."

The most radical of the western anti-environmentalists have threatened armed confrontations with federal officials, such as forest rangers, who attempt to enforce environmental laws on private or public land. Some of the armed militias that are sprouting throughout the country, with encouragement from Gottlieb's gun groups, have shown anti-environmentalist leanings. Endangered species, including seals and owls, are being intentionally hunted down by those who oppose the law protecting them.

DIRTY TRICKS ON THE MEDIA

Increasingly, news events and news organizations are likely to be targets of anti-environmentalist manipulation. The Wise Use group People for the West, which is financed

in large part by the mining industry, launched an attack on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting even before the broadcast of the network's *Frontline* report "Public Lands, Private Profits." The report exposed environmental abuses by gold mining companies, including one that left taxpayers with a \$100 million cleanup bill. The "Fax Alert" from People for the West charged that the documentary was "outrageously one-sided," tried to pressure PBS stations into carrying a pro-mining response, and asked members to contact talk radio programs, newspaper editors, and legislators and ask "if they think it's appropriate to spend federal tax dollars on yellow journalism." No station refused to show the documentary.

Some, mainly in Alaska, broadcast rebuttals from Wise Use advocates.

Ten nationally prominent public relations firms earned a total of more than \$75 million from their corporate clients in 1993 for lobbying and public relations work on environmental issues. (Of the ten largest environmental groups, only the Sierra Club annually spends more than \$1 million on lobbying.) In New York City in 1990, the public relations firm Henry J. Kaufman and Associates, acting on behalf of the National Dairy Board and the makers of bovine growth hormone, arranged for phony "housewives" to infiltrate a conference of dairy farmers opposed to the controversial drug. Attempting to "spin" news coverage of the event, the "housewives" declared their support for injecting cows with the hormone. The ruse was uncovered and publicized by John Stauber, editor of *PR Watch* in Madison, Wisconsin.

When Michael Hansen, the author of a report on the hormone for Consumers Union, got a request for a preview of

It will
fall primarily to
local news
organizations to
find the truth
amid the political
hyperbole

Fortune magazine tackled eco-extremism in its September 19 issue with a story headed, "Environmentalists are on the Run; Business leaders, local officials, and angry citizens are demanding an end to rules based on silly science and bad economics. This time, they just might win." Among the anecdotes peppering the piece, by the magazine's Washington bureau chief, Ann Reilly Dowd, the case of a Montana sheep rancher named John Shuler was offered as Exhibit One of "what drives the reform rebellion."

"One snowy September night he thought he saw a grizzly bear lumbering past his living room window," the article recounted. "Wearing only his skivvies, he grabbed his rifle and raced outside to find three bears rampaging through his sheep herd. When he fired in the air to scare them away, a fourth grizzly emerged from the darkness and turned to attack. Fearing for his life, Shuler shot the bear, which eventually died. For his crimes against an endangered species, the Environmental Protection Agency fined him \$4,000."

That summary was wrong on several counts, and not unusual in the era of the Wise Use anecdote machine. Just for starters, the EPA had nothing to do with the case; the agency involved was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Grizzly bears are listed as a "threatened" species, not having the more serious "endangered" status. More importantly, an administrative law judge, Harvey C. Sweitzer, found that Shuler didn't shoot into the air to scare the bears but first took a shot at three bears running away from him. Seeing a fourth bear as it turned and looked at him, he fired and wounded it. The bear he hit fled and "eventually died," as Dowd put it — but only after Shuler went out the next morning looking for the animal and, when it instinctively charged him, shot it three more times. He also told several federal officials that he would shoot grizzlies again if he could and that he felt lucky to have had an opportunity to kill the bear. A self-defense claim, Judge Sweitzer concluded, just didn't wash this time.

Sources for the *Fortune* piece sounded independent and authoritative — the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), for

example. In fact, ACSH has traditionally received most of its funding from industry, including polluters such as the oil and petrochemical industries, and pharmaceutical industries responsible for controversial food additives that ACSH has pronounced safe. (See *CJR* September/October 1982 and March/April 1990; *Consumer Reports*, May 1994.)

In late 1993, an ABC 20/20 segment by John Stossel reported that Endangered Species Act rules to protect a creature called the Stephens's kangaroo rat in Riverside County, California, had caused the destruction of twenty-nine houses in the 1993 California wildfires because owners couldn't dig up land to make firebreaks. Members of Congress promptly asked for an independent investigation by the General Accounting Office. The GAO report, released last July, concluded that the destruction of homes appeared unrelated to the fire-break regulations and the Endangered Species Act. Citing local fire officials, the GAO report said the wildfire, pushed by 80 mph winds, "moved with such ferocity that clearing hundreds of feet of ground would not have helped because firestorms of this magnitude can blow searing embers and ashes a mile away or even farther . . . weed abatement techniques become moot." Stossel says he found the GAO report less than conclusive.

"The GAO is sometimes quite good, I think," he says. "But this is the accounting firm for the organization that passed the law . . . there seemed to be enough holes in that report that eventually led me to say, 'We didn't go overboard on that story.'"

For her part, *Fortune's* Dowd acknowledges naming the wrong agency in the grizzly bear anecdote but insists that the story as a whole reflects reality. "It seems like the gist of it was right," she said. Checking the facts in the Shuler case, she said, included interviewing Shuler and his attorney, a staff attorney at the Mountain States Legal Foundation, the conservative legal-action group most popularly associated with its former president, former Interior Secretary James Watt. But Dowd, it turned out, was unaware of the contents of the court's report.

K.C.

his findings from a woman claiming to be a scheduler for ABC's *Nightline*, he told a friend at ABC, who checked further. The caller was a phony and the fax number she provided was traced to the offices of the public-relations giant Burson-Marsteller, according to *PR Watch*. In 1992, repeated sabotage forced the activist-author Jeremy Rifkin to cancel the tour promoting his book *Beyond Beef*, an environmental critique of the cattle industry. Rifkin's publicist at Dutton Books received calls from phony reporters trying to get a copy of Rifkin's itinerary. After someone managed to get a copy, radio and TV producers who had scheduled Rifkin appearances started getting calls from someone claiming to be his publicist, canceling or misrepresenting his plans.

CUTTING THE COVERAGE

At a time when well-financed interests are working hard to manipulate the public policy debate over the environment, coverage of the issue has been cut sharply at many news outlets, especially broadcast. An analysis of network news coverage by *The Tyndall Report* showed that the total minutes devoted to environmental coverage declined 60 percent between the peak in 1989, the year of the Exxon Valdez, and 1993. (The leader in coverage, as it has been for years, is ABC.) The de-emphasis — and revisionist reporting in the national media — could lead other journalists to decide that the environment beat is irrelevant, as happened in the late '70s and early '80s. And that could hurt newspaper readership, especially for mid-size newspapers, argues Bob Anderson, veteran environment editor at Baton Rouge's *Advocate*. "There are a lot of highly literate people, especially in college towns, whose main interests aren't getting much attention in the nation's newspapers," Anderson says. "Many of them have given up reading newspapers, in favor of books and journals, because when scientific issues are discussed, they're often handled in a moronic fashion by a reporter who probably didn't understand what he was writing about."

Indeed. In late October, a front-page story in the *Chicago Tribune* attempted to describe how Clean Air Act car-pooling rules, intended to reduce ozone pollution, were likely to affect Chicago-area workers. But thanks to an editor's presumption, the story confused ozone, the air pollutant associated with smog, with the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere that shields the earth from dangerous solar radiation.

Much of the time, environmental stories are complicated and subtle, says Dan Fagin, part of the *Newsday* reporting team that was a Pulitzer finalist last year for reports examining the unusually high incidence of breast cancer on Long Island. "They take a lot of work, they do not have certainty," he says. "And editors like certainty. They want definitive answers. We have to train editors to move beyond that, to start to make them realize people really care about ana-

lytical reporting that includes shades of an issue. Environmental writing can be the exception to this sort of 'cops and courts' mentality of reporting. At *Newsday*, I think it's paid off. I think it shows you don't have to be alarmist or revisionist, that readers do care and are willing to read about the subtleties."

One kind of story that frequently skews the public's understanding of risk is the reporting of individual scientific studies, especially about supposed health risks or cures. Such reporting is a staple for the wire services, and commonly leads to a string of seemingly conflicting stories about things like caffeine or red wine or cholesterol. That does little but frustrate readers. The problem is that much of science is a process, and each study on a subject is a part of a movement toward a consensus. Also, because science is sometimes for sale to the highest bidder, any individual study should be suspect. Whenever scientific research is covered, the financing sources and the background of the researchers should be reported. That puts readers in the picture. "There's a law that for every Ph.D. there is an equal and opposite Ph.D.," says journalist Mark Dowie, who has completed a book for MIT Press critiquing the environmental movement.

ENVIRONMENTAL ALERT

The more success congressional Republicans have in thwarting environmental regulation, the more environmental issues will demand renewed coverage. The "contract with America" includes provisions to limit "unfunded federal mandates" assigned to state and local officials, require cost-benefit analysis of all new regulations — in effect adding to the bureaucratic burden — and guarantee landowners reimbursement for significant property value lost to environmental regulations. Depending on whom one believes, those initiatives are either a stealth attack by polluters and land developers on widely popular environmental laws, or tools that will be used to fine-tune the waste and abuse out of such laws. It will fall primarily to reporters for local news organizations, where the effects would be felt, to find the truth amid the political hyperbole.

William Ruckelshaus, who earns near-unanimous accolades for his stewardship of the EPA under two Republican presidents, warned during a December forum at Harvard University against overzealous "laissez-faire" rollbacks of environmental legislation "because the pendulum, once swung, will inevitably come wildly swinging back."

The newly empowered Republicans have so far scorned that advice. And if the pendulum in environmental coverage swings toward its own kind of laissez-faire, the media could then find themselves back where they were in 1970 and 1990: facing a public hungry for solid environmental news but lacking the reportorial expertise to tell the story. ♦

WHAT'S A BLOOMBERG ?

Hint:
It's Hot.
It Churns Out Financial Stuff.
It's Bigger Than a Breadbox.

by Joe Holley

On a weekday morning in Tokyo, reporter Joy Tadaki prepares her first file of the day on the Japanese stock market, compiles a two-minute radio report on the latest business news out of Tokyo, then hurries into a TV studio and does a live spot on the same material. As the day progresses, Tadaki, an American journalist of Japanese descent, files updated stock market reports, anchors a radio report on Asian business news, and prepares for an interview with a Japanese businessman she'll be taping later in the week.

"The thing that we're doing," Tadaki's editor, David Butts, explains, "is creating a multimedia journalist. At other news companies, you'd find these operations in different buildings or on different floors. Here, they're all in the same room, all produced by the same person." Most editors and reporters in Butts's thirty-eight-person Tokyo bureau are expected to do print, radio, and TV. They have even been coached on radio talk and their TV presence.

In Austin, Texas, meanwhile, on the same day that Joy

Joe Holley is a writer who lives in Austin, Texas.

Tadaki is tracking the Japanese stock market, Anthony Shuga, an assistant business editor for the *Austin American-Statesman*, sits down at the keyboard of a small grey two-tiered computer terminal. Shuga is not interested in Japan on this particular day, but he is interested in the continuing peso devaluation crisis in Mexico and its effect on Austin-based businesses. He calls up eighty-five pages of Mexico business stories, charts, and background information. Noticing a chart tracking monthly closings of the Bolsa Index, he dials an 800 number, gets instructions about how to customize it for *American-Statesman* readers, then makes a copy for the graphics department. "I watched till six or seven last night to see what the wires had, and they didn't have anything," Shuga says, "so what I've got here is a great help."

Welcome to both ends — producer and consumer — of *Bloomberg Business News*, a computerized financial information service founded by Michael Bloomberg, a former head of the equity trading desk at Salomon Brothers, Inc. Bloomberg aspires to build the CNN of business news, and in just five years he seems to be well on his way.

Through a combination of chutzpah, hard work, and drive, the fifty-three-year-old Bloomberg has taken his company, Bloomberg L.P., and shouldered his way into the relatively small fraternity of real-time information providers. By providing volumes of valuable financial data to both "the industry" and to journalists — thousands of items a day — Bloomberg has forced the established members of the fraternity to take notice.

At the heart of the Bloomberg empire, as central to the operation as the black monolith is to Arthur C. Clarke's *2001*, is a machine. It's a desktop computer terminal known eponymously as "the Bloomberg." (Michael Bloomberg is not known for his modesty.) Some 47,000 of these multimedia terminals sit on the desks of Wall Street traders, bankers, analysts, money managers, and other finance professionals.

The "Bloomberg" is the company's profit center; each machine is leased for \$1,000 a month. The terminal provides its subscribers not only continuously updated stock and bond prices — thus the term "real-time" — but detailed securities analysis, historic data on companies around the world, dividend histories, and business graphics, as well as breaking news, sports scores (including cricket), weather information, travel services, even Christmas catalogs and flowers by wire. The terminal transmits audio, video, and still pictures, and there's a lap-top Bloomberg portable.

At the bottom of each *Bloomberg* story is the name and phone number of the reporter. "You can call them up, and they're always friendly and willing to talk," one subscriber says. "I don't know any place else that allows you to do that."

There are probably half a million terminals with real-time information around the world, according to Rusty Todd, formerly a news executive with Dow



Answer:
Michael
Bloomberg's
Financial
News
Machine

Jones/Telerate and now chairman of the journalism department at the University of Texas at Austin. Todd's estimate includes terminals serviced by Telerate (a Dow Jones company), Knight-Ridder, The Associated Press, and Bloomberg in this country; Reuters; three big information services in Japan, and VWD in Germany. Although *Bloomberg* is smaller than Dow Jones, Reuters, and other financial data suppliers — Reuters, for example, has 1,600 journalists at 128 news bureaus — the volume and range of information *Bloomberg* provides is already on a par with the older, more established operations. "They've grown with incredible speed," Todd says.

Bloomberg Business News, the centerpiece of the operation, has 335 reporters in 56 news bureaus worldwide. The main U.S. bureaus are in New York City (for financial news) and Princeton, New Jersey (for business and company news). Along with serving the financial professionals, the service since 1991 has also been providing material to newspapers.

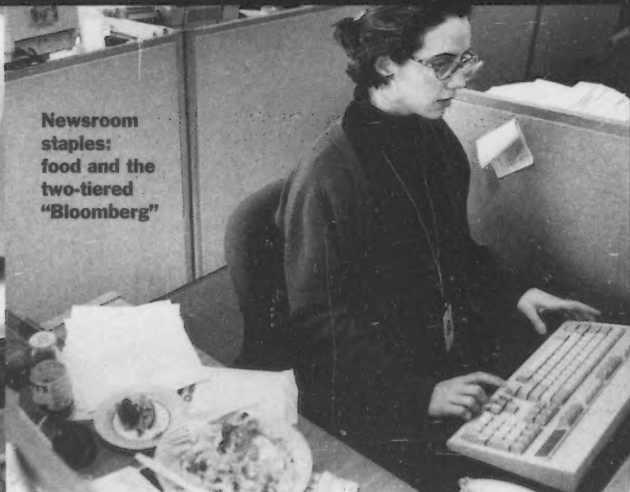
Bloomberg material also is syndicated to customers at 38 radio and 5 commercial TV stations nationwide, and some 200 public television and 500 National Public Radio stations carry *Bloomberg* business programs. The company offers informational TV via cable and satellite, it owns several small New York TV studios, one of which produces *Charlie Rose*; and it owns New York City's WBBR-AM, a station with an all-news format and a business focus. A monthly magazine — called, naturally, *Bloomberg* — was launched in 1992 and has a circulation of 90,000. *Bloomberg Personal*, a slick financial magazine supplement reaching some 6 million subscribers, is an insert in 18 metro dailies across the country.

Forbes magazine has estimated that Michael Bloomberg's 70 percent stake in Bloomberg L.P. is worth \$1.3 billion. Merrill Lynch's initial investment of \$30 million for the other 30 percent in 1984 is now worth an estimated \$600 million. According to Michael Bloomberg, annual revenues for Bloomberg, L.P. are close to \$600 million, more than double what they were in 1991.

"Mike Bloomberg saw an opportunity to jump on the new technology, and he did it much more quickly than Dow Jones or The New York Times Company did," says Joshua Mills, a *New York Times* business and financial news editor.

That opportunity lay in a fortuitous combination of rapidly converging technologies, an increasingly dense and interconnected "nervous system" of global communication, and an exponentially expanding volume of traffic in news and information. Bloomberg understands that "finance," as economist Peter Schwartz has observed, "is not one of the biggest customers of communication services, it is *by far* the biggest customer."

He was in a position to start his company in 1981 because of money he received as a partner when the Phibro Corp. merged with Salomon Brothers. "I had spent sixteen and a half formative years watching other companies," Bloomberg says, "but when Salomon was sold to Philipp Brothers, I was not asked or invited to join the new company. I read some-



"The reason we have the news is to get people to lease our machine. The better the news, the more you need our terminal."

—Michael Bloomberg

where it was because I thought I could run the company better than they could, and that's probably a fair statement. Let's just say I disagreed with their accounting and hiring practices."

In its first eight years, his new company concentrated on providing data and analysis to financial institutions. Then he added another ingredient. In 1989, a year after Matthew Winkler of *The Wall Street Journal* interviewed Bloomberg for a story he was doing, Bloomberg called him up with a question: "What would it take to get in the news business?" After Winkler answered him, Bloomberg hired the veteran writer away from the *Journal*, and made him editor-in-chief of the new *Bloomberg Business News*.

"Bloomberg was a company for eight years before there was prose," Winkler says. Michael Bloomberg and people like him, he adds, "have been buying money, selling money, trading money, and investing money for a living for years. I thought it was a great opportunity to marry their intelligence and knowledge about money, which has been lacking in journalism, and combine it with the intelligence and knowledge and writing talent of journalists, and put it on a real-time basis."

"Matt Winkler loves scoops," says *Esquire* contributing editor Randall Rothenberg, who helped *Bloomberg* reorganize its European news division last year. "He loves investigative projects, great leads, good writing. Of course, their bread and butter is market reports."

The decision to provide terminals to newspapers was a direct bid for journalistic credibility, Winkler acknowledges. In the process of setting up a *Bloomberg* Washington bureau

in 1989, he applied to the Standing Committee of Correspondents of the daily congressional press gallery for credentials to cover Capitol Hill. "They wanted to know 'Where are you published?'" he recalls. "I told them, 'on desks around the world.'" The committee turned him down.

"I can't tell you how insulting it is to have someone from *The Podunk Gazette* tell someone who's written a jillion articles for *The Wall Street Journal* that he can't get his dogtags," Winkler says. "Still, that decision forced me to consider this whole question of respectability and credibility. Unless the stories we do show up in newspapers, they aren't going to take notice."

"It was exactly at that moment," Winkler continues, "that the people at *The New York Times* came to me asking for a Bloomberg terminal. 'We don't have money even for erasers around here,' they said, 'which means we can't pay for it.' As a businessman, I decided that if *Bloomberg* is perceived as credible, that credibility will help us sell more terminals." As soon as *Bloomberg* made its terminal available to the *Times*, other newspapers requested them. "We decided that if a paper had a certain circulation or was a flagship paper, we'd make it available to them, too," Winkler says. The company now has terminals at nearly 150 papers, which, as of July, will be paying only a minimal fee for installation and telephone service. Meanwhile, the New York Times Syndicate will soon include a selection of Bloomberg stories (not real-time data or charts and graphs) in its feed to some 600 newspapers.

Some critics have suggested that Bloomberg's lease-the-box system could become vulnerable to competitors who

VANDA BENENUTI



“Bloomberg was like UPI at warp speed. I’ve always been a workaholic, but Bloomberg turned me into a recovering workaholic.”

—Hal Davis, former Bloomberg employee

feed their data in through customers’ own computers. But Michael Bloomberg has no intention of altering his delivery system, and he sees the newspaper distribution as a kind of advertising, a way to make Bloomberg a household name to his real market, which is the financial community. “The reason we have the news is to get people to lease our machine,” he says. “The better the news, the more you’ll need our terminal.”

Bloomberg’s rapid growth has extracted a certain price from its employees. “They’ve built a tremendous journalism organization in a very short term,” Rothenberg says, “and they’ve done that by getting people to bust their asses in what is basically an electronic sweat shop. It’s a brutal culture. Winkler is one of those guys who’s up at 4:30 in the morning sending e-mail messages.”

Although Bloomberg employees report that they are well paid, they are expected to toil long hours and to master a variety of tasks. Many are at their desks at 7:30 in the morning, hunched before their terminals in crowded, equipment-laden newsrooms. “A cross between a trading floor and a newsroom,” is the way political analyst Kevin Phillips describes the Bloomberg newsroom at Fifty-ninth and Park in New York City. Reporters rarely leave their desks. They grimly joke about the “Bloomberg waistline,” the result of the free Snapple, lunches, and snacks that are always available, enabling them, of course, to remain tied to their computers.

Winkler sets the type-A personality of the newsroom. “Matt Winkler is fond of the thirty-minute tirade,” says Hal Davis, a former Bloomberg employee and now an associate

editor at *The National Law Journal*. “He has the intensity of Steve Dunleavy [a legendary former *New York Post* editor], the charm of Lyndon LaRouche, and the personnel skills of Captain Queeg.”

Davis, who worked at UPI and the *New York Post* before his stint at Bloomberg, walked away from the job after seven months. Although he says he found the work challenging, occasionally even exhilarating, he took issue with what he calls “the human cost of producing a great product. They’ve got a real problem there,” he says. “They’ve got very young kids wearing bandages on their wrists,” a possible sign of repetitive stress syndrome. “The kids don’t complain, but their bodies do. They’re grinding people into the ground.”

“Bloomberg was like UPI at warp speed,” Davis says. “I’ve always been a workaholic, but Bloomberg turned me into a recovering workaholic.”

“Bloomberg is hell,” says Barbara Garson, who wrote a book, *The Electronic Sweatshop*, that critiques the accelerating pace of work in companies that rely on “twentieth-century technology and nineteenth-century scientific management.” (Twenty-first century technology, in Bloomberg’s case). A Bloomberg newsroom, Garson says, offers the perfect recipe for repetitive stress injury. She bases her assessment on reports from both current and former employees. She also points out that with a real-time approach to news, reporters and editors don’t have the peaks and valleys typical of news operations that get out various editions during the day. Real time means real stress, constantly.

Editor-in-chief Winkler not only takes issue with Garson’s assessment of “real-time” dangers, but he says he’s

proud of presiding over a "sweatshop." "I'll take that epithet and wear it proudly," he says. "We're not for everybody, but we're building something here and we have to work like hell to do it."

He does concede that the company had a problem with repetitive stress injury, beginning in 1993 in Tokyo, but maintains that the company has been able to "contain" it with the aid of consultants. "Newsrooms were rearranged and new ergonomically correct furniture and equipment was installed," he says, including a voice-activated computer for an editor who showed symptoms of RSI. The snack bar, he says, was installed to induce people to take short breaks.

Michael Bloomberg, too, makes no apologies for "sweatshop" conditions. "We hire people who are workaholics," he says. "Anybody I've ever known who's accomplished anything works very hard."

"Our company is a meritocracy," he adds. "Our turnover in news is virtually zero. Most of our people seem very happy."

Many current employees confirm their boss's rosy assessment of company morale. They describe the opportunities they've been given to develop a range of skills, to hone their craft, and to work with the latest technology. "I've had to learn to do things that two or three years ago, I never thought I'd be doing this quickly," says one, political reporter John Wordock. He produces and hosts a *Bloomberg* radio show called "The Business of Politics."

Bloomberg also has an administrative editor in charge of learning. Based in the company's Princeton, New Jersey, bureau, Dave Wilson travels to other bureaus and holds clinics and classes on markets, securities, and municipal bonds.

Still, *Esquire's* Rothenberg says the range of employee quality at *Bloomberg* is "very vast, from the terrific to the very bad. I've never seen that kind of range in a news organization." A lack of exposure to journalism basics, an inability to construct a basic sentence, and a stylistic tin ear are the most obvious shortcomings, Rothenberg says. Rick Gladstone, deputy business editor for *The Associated Press* in New York City, says he sees similar problems. "Their writing is not all that strong," he says.

A business reporter at *The Dallas Morning News*, speaking on background, offers a similar assessment. The quality of *Bloomberg's* reporting varies, he says, and because its reporters file and update so often, the final product won't be as clean at the end of the day as, say AP. But "the *Bloomberg*" offers so much information — everything from old press releases to SEC filings to company profiles — that it's a valuable tool. "Of the three terminals I've worked with at the *Morning News* — Dow Jones, Reuters, and *Bloomberg* — *Bloomberg* is the last I'd want to give up," the reporter says.

According to Fred Eliason, assistant day editor in the business section of the *Times*, the historical data *Bloomberg* offers are extremely useful. "It gives you the possibility of looking at the stock-market history of individual companies, and you couldn't do that at all with the equipment we had. We had a Reuters quote machine, but it wasn't the latest gen-

eration. It's funny, but other news services have become much more interested in keeping us up to date on their equipment now that they see how much we're using the *Bloomberg*."

Late at night and on the weekend, says the *Times's* Josh Mills, many *Bloomberg* stories are rewrites, with due credit, of relatively innocuous stories culled from other papers. "It's sort of like all-news radio, with a compulsion to fill the airwaves with something, even though there's nothing new to report," he says.

Bloomberg's work ethic would seem to be a recipe for burnout and mistakes. And real-time mistakes can be extremely costly when the beat involves international financial transactions worth trillions of dollars. Lately, though, *Bloomberg* has avoided egregious errors. "At first they generated a significant number of corrections," Mills says. "We had a meeting with them, and I think the problem has evaporated. They're very accurate."

Winkler acknowledges that some of his younger reporters are, in essence, learning on the job, but he is also quick to point out that *Bloomberg* has had its share of successes recently. "We broke the Orange County bankruptcy story," he says. "We broke it by hours. We also explained it."

Winkler also is proud of a month-long investigation last year of a securities scam involving Banka Bohemia, the seventh largest bank in the Czech Republic. The bank, as *Bloomberg* reporters Rob Urban and Laura Zelenko discovered, had issued \$1.2 billion worth of bogus securities, known as "prime bank guarantees." Among those who bought the securities was the National Council of Churches; the organization's health-insurance fund paid \$7.9 million for prime bank guarantees with a face value of \$8 million. They turned out to be worth nothing.

So what's in store for *Bloomberg Business News*?

"We're growing," Winkler says. *Bloomberg* will soon be opening bureaus in Johannesburg and Beijing. It also has run large ads in *The New York Times* and other publications seeking reporters and editors. Whether the news service can hold on to its employees without moderating the stress is, of course, another question.

Meanwhile, the company is promoting itself like crazy, on the air, in print, and on billboards. Michael Bloomberg hinted last fall that he might go public with his company in the near future, but now he insists he has no such immediate plans. What excites him at the moment, he says, is *Bloomberg's* "audio/video on-demand stuff, which nobody is remotely close to. That's the journalism story of the future."

The *Times's* Fred Eliason predicts that other companies' technology will catch up to *Bloomberg*, that data that have been exclusively *Bloomberg's* will soon be available from other electronic sources. Michael Bloomberg, operating at the nexus of vast global information and fascinating, still-evolving technological toys, will no doubt respond to that development. Neither his ego nor his business acumen allows him any other choice. ♦

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"Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo" on PBS

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MEDIUM MARKET TELEVISION

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"Missing the Beat"

SMALL MARKET TELEVISION

Wisconsin Public Television
"My Promised Land: Bernice Cooper's Story"

INDEPENDENT TELEVISION PRODUCTION

Blackside, Inc.
"The Great Depression" on PBS

CABLE TELEVISION

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JOURNALISM

PUBLIC SERVICE

● Awarded to *The Virgin Islands Daily News*, St. Thomas, for its disclosure of the links between the region's rampant crime rate and corruption in the local criminal system. The reporting, largely the work of Melvin Claxton, initiated political reforms.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer*; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

SPOT NEWS REPORTING

● Awarded to the *Los Angeles Times* staff for its reporting on January 17, 1994, of the chaos and devastation in the aftermath of the Northridge earthquake.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The New York Times* staff; and the *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, staff.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

● Awarded to Brian Donovan and Stephanie Saul of *Newsday*, Long Island, N.Y., for their stories that revealed disability pension abuses by local police.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Dave Davis and Joan Mazzolini of *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland; and Keith A. Harriston and Mary Pat Flaherty of *The Washington Post*.

EXPLANATORY JOURNALISM

● Awarded to Leon Dash, staff writer, and Lucian Perkins, photographer, of *The Washington Post* for their profile of a District of Columbia family's struggle with destructive cycles of poverty, illiteracy, crime and drug abuse.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser* staff; and Ron Suskind of *The Wall Street Journal*.

BEAT REPORTING

● Awarded to David Shribman of *The Boston Globe* for his analytical reporting on Washington developments and the national scene.

○ Nominated as finalists: Michael J. Berens of *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*; Jason DeParle of *The New York Times*; and Tom Hallman, Jr. of *The Oregonian*, Portland.

NATIONAL REPORTING

● Awarded to Tony Horwitz of *The Wall Street Journal* for stories about working conditions in low-wage America.

○ Also nominated as finalists: David Shribman of *The Boston Globe*; and David Zucchino, Stephen Seplov and John Woestendiek of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING

● Awarded to Mark Fritz of the *Associated Press* for his reporting on the ethnic violence and slaughter in Rwanda.


○ Also nominated as finalists: Barbara Demick of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; and Lewis M. Simons and Michael Zielenziger of the *San Jose Mercury News*.

FEATURE WRITING

● Awarded to Ron Suskind of *The Wall Street Journal* for his stories about inner-city honor students in Washington, D.C., and their determination to survive and prosper.

○ Nominated as finalists: David Finkel of *The Washington Post*; Anne V. Hull of the *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*; and Fen Montaigne of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

THE PULITZER PRIZES



← Shribman writes first
political column of year.

← Shribman wins Pulitzer Prize
for Beat Reporting.



After all the hard work, we thought David Shribman could use a little ink.

Congratulations on winning The Pulitzer Prize, David. And thanks for bringing such
astute political reporting from our Washington bureau to our readers everywhere.

The Boston Globe

Celebrating Excellence in Journalism and the Arts

COMMENTARY

● Awarded to Jim Dwyer of *Newsday* for his compelling and compassionate columns about New York City.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Paul A. Gigot of *The Wall Street Journal*; and Carl T. Rowan of the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

CRITICISM

● Awarded to Margo Jefferson of *The New York Times* for her book reviews and other cultural criticism.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Stephen Hunter of *The Baltimore Sun*; and Dorothy Rabinowitz of *The Wall Street Journal*.

EDITORIAL WRITING

● Awarded to Jeffrey Good of the *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times* for his editorial campaign urging reform of Florida's probate system for settling estates.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The Des Moines (Iowa) Register* editorial staff; and Bailey Thomson, Carol McPhail and David Thomasson of the *Mobile (Ala.) Press Register*.

EDITORIAL CARTOONING

● Awarded to Mike Luckovich of *The Atlanta Constitution*.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Robert L. ARIail of *The State*, Columbia, S.C.; and Jim Borgman of *The Cincinnati Enquirer*.

SPOT NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

● Awarded to Carol Guzy of *The Washington Post* for her series of photographs illustrating the crisis in Haiti and its aftermath.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Denis Farrell of the *Associated Press*; and David Leeson of *The Dallas Morning News*.

FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

● Awarded to the *Associated Press* staff for its portfolio of photographs chronicling the horror and devastation in Rwanda.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Carl Bower, a free-lance photographer, for a series published by Newhouse News Service; and the *Long Beach (Calif.) Press-Telegram* staff.

LETTERS

FICTION

● "The Stone Diaries" by Carol Shields (Viking).

DRAMA

● "The Young Man from Atlanta" by Horton Foote.

HISTORY

● "No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II" by Doris Kearns Goodwin (Simon & Schuster).

BIOGRAPHY

● "Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life" by Joan D. Hedrick (Oxford University Press).

POETRY

● "The Simple Truth" by Philip Levine (Alfred A. Knopf).

GENERAL NON-FICTION

● "The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time" by Jonathan Weiner (Alfred A. Knopf).

MUSIC

● "String Music" by Morton Gould.

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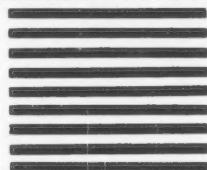
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Washington Post Journalists Win Two Pulitzer Prizes

**The 1995 Pulitzer Prize
for Spot News Photography**
Carol Guzy
for a portfolio of 20
photographs covering the
crisis in Haiti



Carol Guzy has been documenting the plight of the poor people of Haiti on and off for 15 years. Last year she returned to that troubled country to cover the events that led to a U.S. invasion and the restoration to power of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Fifty-four of her masterful photographs were published in *The Post* last year. The extraordinary photograph of two young American soldiers protecting an equally young beating victim from a frenzied crowd, shown here, "said more about that phase of the operation than anything we put on the airwaves," wrote *Today* Show host Bryant Gumbel in a letter to Guzy, and "merits comparison to some of the great news photos of all time."

Her Haiti portfolio has also won the 1995 White House News Photographers Association photographer of the year award and took first prizes in both the World Press and National Press Photographers Association competitions.



By Carol Guzy—*The Washington Post*

"Rosa Lee's Story" was the culmination of more than four years of work by Washington Post investigative reporter Leon Dash and staff photographer Lucian Perkins. An intimate look at one family's history of marginal education, chronic unemployment,

drug abuse and repeated imprisonment extending over three generations, it tackled questions that had frustrated urban poverty experts for years and offered readers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest.



**The 1995 Pulitzer Prize
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By Lucian Perkins—*The Washington Post*

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NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS

Sponsored by the American Society of Magazine Editors,
with support from the Magazine Publishers of America, and administered by
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When we nominated Mike Luckovich's cartoons for a Pulitzer, the judges laughed.



Then, they awarded him the prize.

For AJC Cartoonist Mike Luckovich, it seemed like a long time coming—but well worth the wait. On Tuesday, Mike won journalism's highest award, the Pulitzer Prize, for editorial cartooning. Although this was his first Pulitzer, Mike is no stranger to winning awards. Mike won the 1990 and 1994 Overseas Press Club

awards, the 1992 National Headliner Award and the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Award.

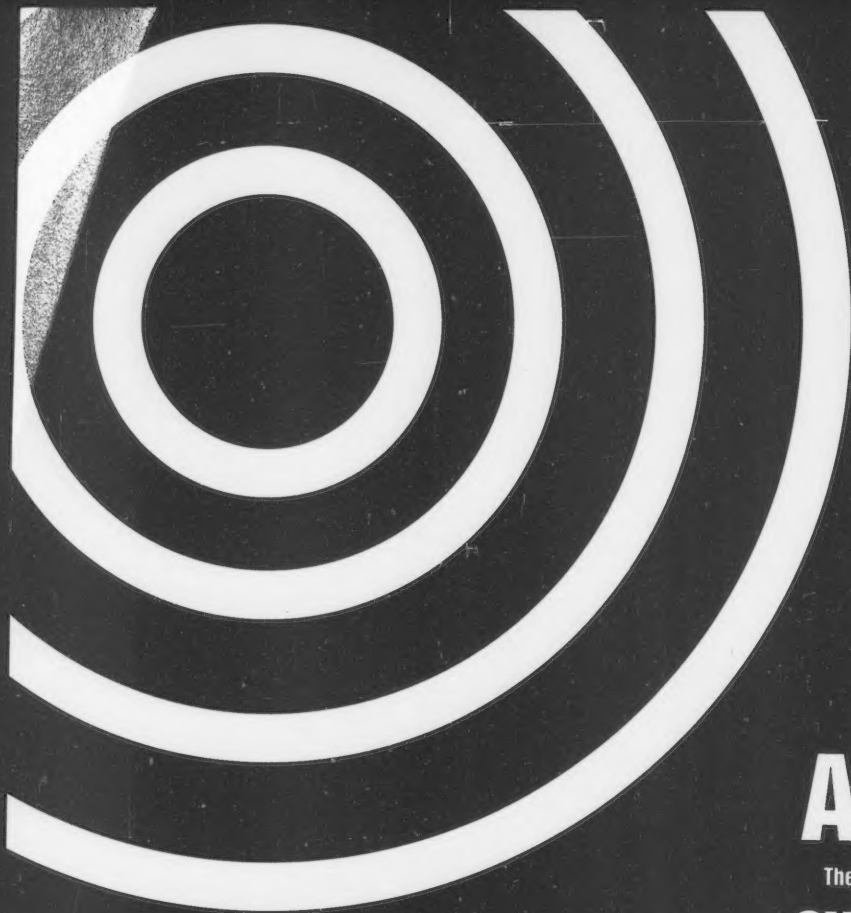
This latest Pulitzer is the fourth in eight years for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, representing our commitment to bringing our readers the best—from investigative reporting to editorial cartoons. Please join us

in congratulating Mike Luckovich on his Pulitzer—then feel free to laugh.



Congratulations Mike Luckovich!

The Atlanta Journal
THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION
The long and the short of it



Ah, the **PRESS PASS**

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Columbia Journalism Review. The presses can run but they can't hide.

The Virtual Water Cooler

Where journalists hang out on-line



One of the main reasons for the recent explosion of Internet use among people who don't consider themselves particularly computer-friendly is the ease with which it connects people around the world who have common interests. Journalists are no exception to this, as the sampling of experiences that follows illustrates.

Listening to the Lists

Here's a frightening academic certainty: somewhere, someone on some college campus is trying to understand journalism by analyzing journalism discussion lists on the Internet. This is like seeking to analyze the Italian Renaissance by sending spaghetti to a lab.

These J-lists deal with but do not equal journalism. Still, they are spreading. Basically, they mechanically distribute participants' posts, or comments, to subscribers' e-mail addresses. The ensuing dialogues can be prone to irrational excess and vacant conjecture, to the misdirected stab, the startling backlash, the wan-

dering conclusion. And they can be useful and stimulating.

A confession: I skim, sometimes pore over, and occasionally contribute to these lists. SPJ-L (formed for the Society of Professional Journalists), Journet (journalism educators), and IRE-L (Investigative Reporters and Editors) are among my favorite hangouts. Gaps in my mailbox are plugged by NPPA-L (National Press Photographers Association), an open-records forum called FOI-L, and a couple of broadcast lists.

Most days on these lists are placid, devoted to quiet discussions or to mundane searches for news leads or background. Other days, the zeitgeist is more surreal. Watching January's Chung-Gingrich controversy on the lists I follow was like watching an anaconda swallow a goat. Word that Newt's mom had been Connied (or, through a different lens, that Chung had been Mommed) broke on a Wednesday, and reaction bloated SPJ-L through the weekend. Three weeks later, the last posters finally said good riddance.

Even in Chung-free periods, mailstorms often clog the lists. The "owner" of CARR-L, a computer-aided reporting list he considers a "virtual newsroom," has recently chided gassy subscribers. When two students posted term papers to IRE-L, some applauded but others flamed.

For me, on-line debates about journalistic practice can inspire classroom discussions, connect me to old friends in the trade, and supply ideas and contacts. Here are a few lessons the J-lists have taught me.

1) People who are well organized in seeking information get strong, useful responses. People who ask bonehead questions don't.

2) Subscribers who aren't journalists care passionately about how journalists think and work, and sometimes bring more reason to the table.

3) Certain contributors are willing to appear rude, naive, or bigoted if it helps them make points or clarify issues.



4) To carry a half-cooked idea or an overstuffed ego onto a journalism list is like paying a visit to Hannibal Lecter in bikini briefs.

5) You can't read everything ever posted. Cut your losses. Get a life.

Jim Upshaw

Jim Upshaw (jupshaw@oregon.uoregon.edu), a former network television reporter, teaches journalism at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication.

Down in the Well

The on-line world is full of reporters doing what reporters do: assembling research, finding things to read, wasting time, cultivating sources, floating trial balloons, complaining about editors, following paper trails, moonlighting, sniping at the competition, and hanging out. I hang out at The Well, an electronic conferencing service connecting more than 11,000 subscribers to the Internet and each other from a base in Sausalito. (It began as an offshoot of the *Whole Earth Review*; Well stands for Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link). At any given moment it has hundreds of conferences on thousands of topics. I hang out in three of them, Media, Writers, and Byline.

Every Well habitué, journalist or not, has a different response to the question of why he or she returns day after day. I fell into The Well in 1993 while researching a magazine story. The source I was tracking down had moved on, but by the time I figured that out, I was hooked. Within six months I had

logged my first hundred-dollar month. The service's intimacy and camaraderie are qualities that I find appealing: camaraderie, because the medium brings a spectrum of interesting, opinionated people to your desktop; intimacy, because, after all, it's just you and your computer, alone in a room somewhere.

The Well acquired its cachet as a national media forum only in the last year or so. Its Media conference is an issues-and-arguments kind of place where, as one regular puts it, "Minds are actually changed; people learn." It can be tough, too. At the other end of the scale is the Writers conference, which Whole Earth's founder, Stewart Brand, describes as "endlessly kind." Compared to Media, Writers is a genteel salon, where we cheer large and small successes and console each other after failures. Byline, a hybrid of the two, was started earlier this year, mostly to discuss how to earn a living as a writer. Topics focus on business practices, who pays what, and "When Editors Say _____ They Really Mean _____."

Well conferences often drift off topic, sometimes delightfully. A discussion on journalists and cyberspace I started a while ago in Media rambled through a week-long debate on how reporters really work on-line, then turned into a conversation on the myth of objectivity, and then disintegrated into a discussion of whether calling someone a fuckhead could be considered an ad hominem attack. Finally, someone asked, "Well, if we've got that one sorted out, can we work on what is ad feminem?" Someone answered, "It's those commercials on TV that never say precisely what the product is used for." That's what keeps bringing me back to The Well.

Lisa Greim

Lisa Greim (lisa@well.com) is a Denver writer and cohost of the Rocky Mountain West conference on The Well.

The Sting of Cybercriticism

The weirdest moments for me at the virtual water cooler come when one of my own articles comes up for discussion. Last year I had a long piece in *The New Yorker*, and I admit that during the entire process of producing the piece I

wondered how it would fly in the extremely active colloquy devoted to that magazine in The Well's Media conference, one of the forums where I hang out. Though the piece was well-received almost everywhere, I was stunned to find some of my fellow Well-heads trashing it on-line, one of them in particular making remarks that would have been grounds for a fistfight had they been uttered to me directly. Since I was a presence in the conference, this harshest of critics must have known that I would read the remarks. I was thrown into a quandary — should I attempt to defend myself against criticisms that, in my view at least, were so bogus that calling attention to them would have given them too much credence? I eventually decided to wait to see if someone else would defend me, and, indeed, someone did.

Later, I figured out that the appearance of the criticism in my own hang-out had upset me a lot more than if I had received the same remarks in the form of a letter from a reader. On the other hand, that freedom-to-offend is a strength of The Well's culture. Without it, the discussions would be a lot less interesting, and I'd probably visit much less frequently.

Steven Levy

Steven Levy (steven@echonyc.com) is a Fellow at the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, a technology columnist at Newsweek, and the author of several books, most recently Insanely Great: The Life and Times of Macintosh, the Computer That Changed Everything.

Caught Up In the Web

The brochure advertised "an exciting and breathtaking 'fly-by' over The Strip at night," a helicopter ride over Las Vegas. I pressed a button and within a few minutes was looking down over more neon per square inch than I'd ever seen, pondering the obscene amounts of money being gambled away in the casinos below.

I've never been in a helicopter, I've never been to Las Vegas, and the adventure described above barely cost me a cent. I was in a library, actually, experiencing Virtual Las Vegas, a site

on the Internet's World Wide Web maintained by Las Vegas's KLAS-TV. The site includes weather forecasts (including audio from the KLAS newsroom), entertainment schedules, a form for electronic comments, lots of neon-infested photos, and links to other news-related sites all over the country — and all of this information is just a mouse-click away.

I've been spending a lot of time lately on the World Wide Web. If you haven't heard much about it yet, you will soon. Hundreds of newspapers and magazines — as well as thousands of businesses and private individuals — are racing to establish presences on this rapidly growing, multimedia-ready section of the Internet, which can be accessed with so-called "browser" software and a special type of Internet connection. In addition to its multimedia potential, which is unprecedented on the net, the Web's main innovation is its use of something called hypertext linking. What this means is that you need only to click on a highlighted word, phrase, or graphic to be transported to another spot on the same site or to a different site on another computer anywhere in the world.

When I sat down to do some Web-surfing as research for this piece, I intended to concentrate most of my attention on on-line magazines and newspapers (this magazine *is* about journalism, after all). For the first twenty minutes I was fine: I first checked out the *San Jose Mercury News's* impressively large and up-to-date Web site, then clicked myself over to Pathfinder, Time Inc.'s recently launched site, which includes areas devoted to *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*, among other publications. It was there that I started to get off-track: I followed a series of links until I found myself downloading Monty Python sound files from a home page (as a site's main screen is called) in Finland, and then visited an unofficial Snapple home page (which, like many of the more unusual home pages, is maintained by a fan — in this case, a college student who scanned in labels of his favorite flavors). This non-lin-

Journalists are learning to use the Internet in their work, of course, but thousands of them are also using it to talk shop. Once connected (often through commercial service providers such as CompuServe, 800-848-8199, America Online, 800-827-6364, or The Well, 415-332-4335), they gather around the virtual water cooler, conversing via electronic mailing lists and bulletin board systems (BBSs), the two main ways for people to share ideas and information on-line.

With electronic mailing lists, you don't have to go looking for information — it finds you. All messages that are sent to a list's address are automatically distributed to the electronic mailbox of every subscriber on the list. To join a list, you simply send an e-mail message to the list's maintainer (which has a slightly different address from the list itself), telling that person (if the list is maintained manually) or, more often, that computer (if it is maintained automatically) that you want to join.

Some samples: Society of Professional Journalists sponsors a general and busy journalism discussion list: (to join, send a message to listserv@psuvm.psu.edu with subscribe spj-l your name in the body of the message). GUILDNET-L is a discussion of working conditions in the media in the U.S. and Canada (address: guild-l@acs.ryerson.ca; message: subscribe guildnet-l your e-mail address). CARR-L is a busy list for dialogue about computer-assisted reporting (address: listserv@ulkyvm.louisville.edu; message: subscribe CARR-L your name). Investigative Reporters and Editors has a list too (address: listserv@mizzou1.missouri.edu; message: subscribe IRE-L your name). There are many others. Once you have been added to a list, your mailbox will begin filling up (see Jim Upshaw's article in this section). To respond to a message you find interesting, or to try to start a discussion about a new topic, you just send an e-mail message to the list. It's simple.

On the other hand, it can be time-consuming to wade through the dozens of entries in your inbox to find the messages you're interested in. For this reason, BBSs can be a much more efficient way of interacting. With BBSs, the information doesn't come to you — you go to it. The bulletin-board metaphor is apt: a BBS is a collection of virtual bulletin boards where users "lack" messages and responses. Since most BBSs are composed of many "conferences" or "forums" on various topics, users can choose the discussion subjects they are interested in and ignore the rest. And you can ignore your computer for a few days without worrying about a growing pile of virtual mail.

BBSs come in all shapes and sizes. The biggest one of all, USENET, is accessible to millions of Internet users worldwide (most Internet services provide access to it) and has thousands of discussion areas, called "newsgroups," to which users interested in everything from Bosnia to bestiality can post messages (journalists should check out "alt.journalism" and "alt.journalism.criticism," among other journalism-related newsgroups). On a much smaller scale, there are various kinds of local BBSs, ones that often are not connected to the Internet and that, for example, allow residents of a town to discuss local politics (see Jere Downs's article in this section).

In between are on-line journalism conferences, such as JFORUM on CompuServe or the Journalism, Writer, or Byline conferences on The Well (see Lisa Greim's and Steven Levy's pieces in this section). The cost can be hourly, monthly, or some combination, and can be billed to your credit card.



erarity, which is inherent to the very concept of hypertext, can be slightly unnerving.

You can waste enormous amounts of time surfing on the Web — though sometimes part of the fun is sifting through useless-yet-entertaining information. In five or ten years, the Web could be a boon for information seekers everywhere. Or it could also be just one more way for the world to amuse itself to death.

Andrew Hearst

Andrew Hearst (ignatius@echonyc.com) is CJR's editorial/production assistant.

A Window at the County Seat

On-line reporting used to be one of those things I knew I should learn someday, but the demands of covering Norristown, Pennsylvania, a depressed former mill town, always seemed to push computer literacy aside. Then, when a handful of Norristown gadflies started their own computer bulletin board, I was plunged into the on-line world.

One forum on this bulletin board became a political battleground. Computer-literate Democrats began to trade stinging commentary on the forum, called the County Seat because

Norristown is the seat of Montgomery County. They accused the Republican mayor, for example, of fostering illegal gambling rackets, protecting local slumlords, and ignoring corruption in the police department. My first clue that Norristown was being discussed in a parallel universe came when I walked into the mayor's office one morning and found him swearing and waving a sheaf of paper. The mayor, who doesn't own a computer and refuses to learn how to access County Seat, nonetheless had obtained a printout of recent discussions.

These drive-by shootings on the information highway, and the mayor's initial inability to respond, were news, although the story had to wait a few days while I fumbled around with a modem. And the reporting presented issues I had never faced before. Before quoting directly from conversations I had to track individuals down to confirm that they had made the comments. Because it was a free, universally-accessible forum, my editors at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and I eventually decided to treat the contents of the County Seat as a public record. We tried to screen out potentially libelous remarks.

Once I became familiar with County Seat I was astonished to find users encroaching on my job. Minutes of borough council meetings had been posted, along with the entire content of certain municipal ordinances and a swirl of invective, rumors, and tidbits. Instead of the *Inquirer's* culling this raw information for people, people were pulling it off-line for free. As time passed, however, these fears faded somewhat; it seems that people still count on the paper to sort and present vital information in an unbiased manner.

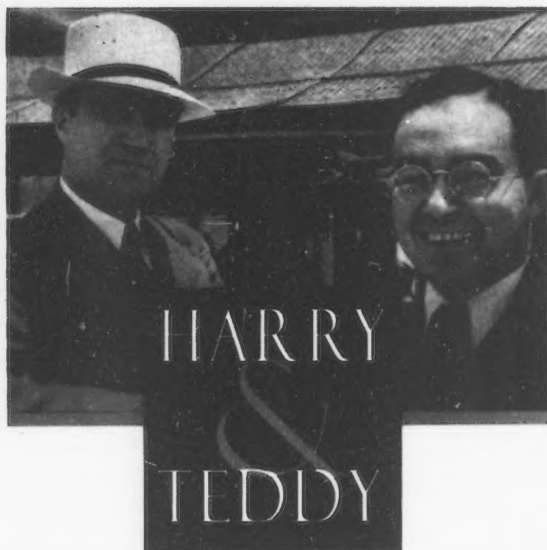
I recently left the Norristown beat. When I trained my replacement, I gave her the usual tour of the town and a raft of phone numbers and leads. But I also spent an hour with her at the computer, teaching her to access the County Seat. It will be required reading.

Jere Downs

Jere Downs is a staff writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. *The County Seat* can be found in the Far Point Station bulletin board via modem at 610-272-6244.

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Illustrated with photographs

RANDOM HOUSE

Smart and Smarter

by Piers Brendon

This is the best and the worst book about Harold Ross, the country bumpkin who founded *The New Yorker* just seventy years ago. It's the best in an academic sense: Thomas Kunkel, himself an itinerant journalist, is the first biographer to take the full measure of his subject, studying the literature, exploring the archives, quizzing witnesses. It's the worst in that Kunkel's text cries out for an editor

GENIUS IN DISGUISE: HAROLD ROSS OF THE NEW YORKER

BY THOMAS KUNKEL
RANDOM HOUSE
498 PP. \$25.

like Ross, who would have spattered it with marginalia such as "What mean?" "Fix," and even "ga," a frantic squiggle signifying incoherent disgust. Equally flawed is Kunkel's interpretation. He answers the fundamental question about Ross — how did this uncouth provincial create a magazine that became the acme of metropolitan sophistication? — by claiming that he was a genius in disguise.

Certainly Ross, for all his droll eccentricities, was touched by brilliance. Born in Aspen, Colorado, in 1892, he spent a knockabout childhood neglecting his studies and a raffish youth as a tramp reporter. Yet by 1918 Ross had become, as editor of *The Stars and Stripes* (the American forces' newspaper in France), the most famous private in the army. On returning home he set up the chaotic Manhattan ménage known as Wit's End with Jane Grant (his first wife) and Alexander Woolcott, and joined the vicious circle at the Algonquin Round Table. In 1925, after several false starts, Ross launched *The New Yorker*. It was a good moment, since radio and television had yet to establish themselves, while new technology and low postage rates enabled magazines to make fortunes.

Ross edited with roars, snarls, and self-pitying whimpers: "I live the life of a hunted animal." He paid obsessive attention to detail: after long considering a sketch of a Model T driving along a dirt road he barked, "Better dust." He exhorted his staff with eloquent profanity:

"God bless you, McNulty, goddamn it." "You *can't* quit," he told E.B. White, "this isn't a magazine — it's a Movement!" Soon Ross had attracted a galaxy of talent including James Thurber, Ring Lardner, Janet Flanner, Clifton Fadiman, A.J. Liebling, Meyer Berger, Peter Arno, and Charles Addams. All were driven to distraction by the editor's manic perfectionism: when the revolution came, Dorothy Parker opined, it would be "everybody against Ross." But few denied that his methods worked. The magazine set glossy new standards of literary journalism. It pioneered innovations in comedy and art. It created a distinctive culture of urbanity.

Yet to all appearances Ross remained a shambling backwoodsman. Ben Hecht said that he "looked like a resident of the Ozarks and talked like a saloon brawler." Ross was dirty-fingernailed and "burglar-faced." A cigarette hung from his lips and his hair stood up like a lavatory brush. He sucked cold drinks through a napkin to keep them from hurting his gappy teeth. He was the despair of Brooks Brothers, whose salesman invited him to take his custom elsewhere



ABOUT
BOOKS

Piers Brendon, author of *The Life and Death of the Press Barons*, is a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge.

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— "Jeesus! You'd 'a thought I was some kind of oorang-ootan." At times he did seem more primate than articulate. "I don't want you to think I'm not incoherent," he told Robert Benchley. The poet Samuel Hoffenstein said that talking to Ross was like drinking a glass of water without the glass.

If this was genius it was extremely well disguised. Kunkel maintains that it had to be. Ross played the part of the hayseed for his own deft purposes and used his "rusticity to great advantage." He pretended ignorance in order to spur his writers on to greater clarity. Even his celebrated query — "Is Moby Dick the whale or the man?" — was part of an unflagging quest for precision. Ross feigned philistinism so that he did not have to "engage in philosophical arguments over every disputed comma or brushstroke."

Behind the bucolic mummery, says Kunkel, Ross was a "voracious reader" who could even be regarded as a "closet intellectual." Ross had "a near-perfect ear for language" and wrote in what Rebecca West called a "clear, hard, classical American style." He was largely free of the vulgar prejudices and gauche pruderies of his western adolescence. He had a well-developed aesthetic sense and an abiding respect for creativity.

Kunkel's argument is similar to that of recent historians who claim that President Eisenhower hid his political adroitness behind a mask of geniality and ineptitude. But neither case holds water and Kunkel's is a sieve, not least because Ross *liked* arguing about commas — one journalist suggested that his biography should be entitled "The Century of the Comma Man."

The fact is that Ross's general reading hardly extended beyond Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, a book about eels, and *True Detective* magazine. Not knowing it was a quotation, he improved Tennyson's famous phrase to "nature red in claw and tooth." Ross had a tenuous grasp of the English language: he always spelled the word prodigal "progidal" and he thought that homosexuals were called "amorphodites." He himself did

not write well enough for *The New Yorker*. As one staff member said, Ross strove for prose that was "both plain and baroque" and his sentences resembled "the handiwork of a Henry James with a tin ear."

Pace Kunkel, Ross nursed primitive notions about race, sex, and art. He disparaged blacks and did not employ them even as messengers. During World War II he started a harangue, "The trouble with you Jews, Hellman . . ." One of his three wives confessed that she had never seen him naked and he was apt to complain, "Goddamn it, I hate the idea of going around with female hormones in me." He spent much of his time trying to excise double entendres from *The New Yorker* and the closest he came to formulating an editorial policy (said Wolcott Gibbs) was this admonition to his staff: "Don't fuck the contributors." Ross denounced painting and music as "phony arts." William Shawn, who succeeded as editor on Ross's death in 1951, admitted that the term "literary" was for years "a house pejorative." Ross told his secretary never to leave him alone with poets, whom he proposed to pay by the length of their lines.

All this emerges from previous books about Ross. Incomparably the best of them is James Thurber's magical evocation of the man, *The Years with Ross* (1959). It's penetrating as well as hilarious, though it does tend to present Ross as yet another character in the Thurber carnival. Brendan Gill's portrait, in *Here at The New Yorker* (1975), is also larger than life but it is etched in acid. Similarly exuberant, though less distinguished, are Jane Grant's *Ross, The New Yorker and Me* (1968) and Dale Kramer's *Ross and The New Yorker* (1951), which its subject refused to read on the ground that it began with the word "It."

Apart from the last, these authors were close to Ross and their testimony carries conviction. They regarded him as a fascinating bundle of contradictions, not a homogeneous genius whose inconsistencies could be explained away as part of an elaborate pose. Such reductionism is facile. The truth is that despite Ross's boorishness, and because of it, he was just the man to

make *The New Yorker* a model of journalistic elegance.

One who knew them both said that Ross had the same kind of charismatic force as James Joyce. He charmed outstanding contributors onto his magazine although, as Liebling joked, Ross would no more have thought of offering them money than of offering a horse an ice-cream soda. Ross goaded and bullied the best out of them. He had an instinctive sense of what was wrong with a piece of writing or a cartoon. He used gurus like Katharine White to supply the sensibility he lacked. Thus, as Shawn said, he fashioned the "literate, observant, very particularized, light-handed, timely writing that was to revolutionize the American magazine article."

Ross's other achievements, such as refining the one-line cartoon caption, turning fact-checking into a science, devoting an entire issue to John Hersey's account of bombed Hiroshima, and steering *The New Yorker* through isolationist and McCarthyite shoals, are well covered by Kunkel, who pays his subject the compliment of taking him seriously. Nevertheless, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Ross's life was essentially the stuff of comedy. Everything contributed to it, from his Runyonesque poker-playing ("I'm cursed! Something I did to God!") to his slapstick feuds with the likes of Woolcott, Raoul Fleischmann (his publisher), and Walter Winchell, who scorned the "gintelligentsia" and accused Ross of not wearing underclothes — Ross mailed Winchell his current underdrawers.

Maybe the humor is dated. As Kunkel reminds us, Ross was a man of his time — he bore the scars of a childhood stagecoach accident and never travelled by air. Yet he remains a comic curmudgeon for the ages. And he was often amusing when he meant to be, as happened during his memorable spat with *Time* magazine. In a letter to Henry Luce justifying Gibbs's parody of its style, he signed himself, "Harold Wallace Ross — small man . . . furious . . . mad . . . without taste."

Museum Piece

By Jim Wooten



Sevareid in '44: "A constant willingness to look and see, to listen and learn."

In 1985, CBS News invited Eric Sevareid to appear in its commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of VE Day. Past seventy by then, he walked with a cane and wore a heavy back-brace; but the war had been the seminal experience of his life and, eager to get back in harness, he flew to London, then on to the banks of the Rhine where, with videotape rolling, he recreated the radio commentary he'd broadcast from the same spot for the same network in 1945 — an elegant little essay explaining why the absolute truth about combat "can never be communicated" by reporters or soldiers.

War happens inside a man . . . and that is why, in a certain sense, you and your sons from the war will be forever strangers.

If, by the miracles of art and genius, in later years two or three among them can

Jim Wooten is a senior correspondent for ABC News.

open their hearts and the right words come, then perhaps we shall all know a little of what it was like — and we shall know then that all the present speakers and writers hardly touched the story.

Good, wasn't he? Yet when the producers saw that solemn face gravely addressing the camera, they deemed it *too dull*, and quickly dissolved to archival pictures irrelevant to his words. They seemed to have no sense of who he was or what he represented, of how or why the craggy Nordic features they had wiped from the screen were once recognizable to millions of Americans. Seeing themselves as the future of television — the young Merlins of the new magic, the kaleidoscopic

graphics, the spinning images, the intricacies of satellite technology — the producers saw the old man as a museum-piece, as obsolete as the wireless, as passé as the lofty standards

THE AMERICAN JOURNEY OF ERIC SEVAREID

BY RAYMOND A. SCHROTH
STEERFORTH PRESS
462 PP. \$28.

he and his generation had set, as dry as the analyses and the plodding documentaries in which they had taken so much pride.

The truth is, they were right.

If a rejuvenated young Sevareid were job-hunting at the networks these days, like some resurrected Lincoln running for president, he'd damn well be out of luck. *Too dull*. What is also true, however, is that he was similarly unsuited to his own day as well — frightened by microphones and cameras, blinded by lights, burdened

with an expressionless voice, resistant to coaching and improvement. "The paradox of his life was that he really did not belong in broadcasting," Raymond A. Schroth concludes in *The American Journey of Eric Sevareid*, an admiring but ultimately sad biography of one of the country's most prominent journalists, a genuine icon whose long public career (thirty-eight years at CBS) brought him fame and fortune but whose personal life — to the very end of it — brimmed with grief and guilt.

But what a remarkable life it was, a

rich lode of adventure and achievement Schroth has skillfully mined and processed into a narrative that traces Arnold Eric Sevareid's journey across nine separate decades, from his birth on the icy North Dakota prairie in 1912 — three weeks after Woodrow Wilson had won the presidency — to his death in steamy Georgetown in the summer of 1992, on the eve of Bill Clinton's nomination.

From his boyhood on the Mouse River, Sevareid single-mindedly

pursued his dream of becoming a newspaperman, a writer. As a child, he learned to set type at the weekly owned by a friend of his father. As a kid just out of high school, he wrote a surprisingly good book about his hair-raising 2,000-mile canoe-trip to Hudsons Bay. At the University of Minnesota, he worked for the campus daily and two Minneapolis newspapers (posing as a room-service waiter to interview Katharine Hepburn); and in 1937, a couple of years after graduating, he and his new wife, Lois, went to Paris where he joined the staff of the *New York Herald Tribune*, moonlighted for the United Press, and was soon noticed by Edward R. Murrow, always trolling for talent.

Murrow called from London in the summer of '39 to offer a job with CBS. Sevareid was reluctant. After all, he was a *writer*, not a broadcaster; but he was also about to become a father — twin sons, as it turned out — and so, at \$250 a month, he became one of "Murrow's boys" (along with William L. Shirer, Howard K. Smith, Charles Collingwood, Winston Burdett, and Larry LeSueur), adding his flat baritone to one of the most distinguished reportorial choirs ever assembled — though his own uninflected voice was hardly the paradigm for radio then or now. (Years later, one of his sons said he coveted Murrow's mellifluous voice. "So do I," Sevareid answered.)

What he did bring to his new job and perhaps, as Schroth suggests, what he would leave as his professional legacy was "an attitude toward journalism," the essence of which was an uncompromising respect for the intelligence of his readers and listeners (and eventually his viewers) and for the power and primacy of words, spoken or written. He was a twenty-six-year-old rookie in 1939 but he worked hard and learned quickly, broadcasting moving and memorable descriptions of the Germans' approach to Paris, the exodus of thousands from the city, and finally the French capitulation; from London, like his boss, he offered vivid vignettes of life inside the blitz, though he did not try to match what he called Murrow's

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Hemingwayesque "fixation with physical bravery." Unlike him, Severeid spent many hours in air-raided shelters, though two years later, he left Washington for the war again. "He was afraid," says Schroth, "but he conquered his fear."

That fear was never greater than the day in 1943 when he parachuted from a crippled army plane into Burma. He'd been en route to China; instead, he and nineteen other survivors, including the diplomat John Paton Davies (whom he later defended against Senator McCarthy), were rescued by head-hunters and, playing hide-and-seek with Japanese patrols, walked out through the jungle back to India. There, Severeid crawled back into another C-46 and flew to Kunming, his original destination. Then came the Italian campaign, from Anzio to Rome, after which he took the Allies' southern route through Marseilles and finally across the Rhine into the final moments of the war. Severeid landed back in America the day Franklin Roosevelt died, having had, as they say, a *good* war. He'd not only survived, he'd also earned a graduate degree in the only curriculum that really matters in journalism, what Homer Bigart often called the school of portable ignorance — the constant willingness to look and see, to listen and learn.

In the post-war years, radio was still king and Severeid one of its princes, a familiar and forceful voice, far ahead of Murrow, for instance, and most everyone else in condemning McCarthy's witch-hunts; but he was always writing as well: a classic memoir (*Not So Wild a Dream*), several other books, and scores of articles for various magazines. As television sprouted and grew, he painfully adjusted himself to its demands — though never completely — and to its celebrity. He hosted a weekly summary of the news from New York and frequently appeared in Murrow's various programs; but he did not become a television reporter, like the dashing Collingwood, for example. Instead, working mainly from Washington, he presented himself as a thinker, a pundit, adapting his standard

five-minute radio commentaries to the two-minute television essays that would become a staple of the *CBS Evening News* and bring him both respect and reproach, including Spiro Agnew's. After the vice president's alliterative attack in 1970 on the news analysis, Severeid fired back. "Nobody in this business expects . . . that the full truth of anything will be contained in any one account or commentary," he said, "but . . .

the central point about the free press is not that it be accurate . . . but that it be free — and that means . . . freedom from any and

all attempts by any power of government to coerce it or intimidate it in any way.

It was vintage Severeid, a masterful rejoinder that reflected all he'd learned about his craft and his country — though by then, he was as preoccupied with the tragedy playing itself out in his private life as he was with national policy and politics. Lois, a bright and vivacious attorney, had descended into the violent mood swings of manic-depression; he was for years fastidiously solicitous of her needs but finally divorced her for a



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woman twenty years younger. That brittle marriage produced a daughter but also ended in divorce. His third wife, Suzanne St. Pierre, was a talented producer who became his widow.

Schroth makes clear that during the '60s and '70s, as America was changing, so was Severeid, moving toward a conservatism clearly reflected in his embrace of the cold war as a necessary struggle between good and evil. Still, along toward the end of it, he offered his viewers an eloquent condemnation of the Vietnam War and, in his final broadcast in 1977, provided his own blunt appraisal of his work and his career:

There is in the American people a tough, undiminished instinct for what is fair. Rightly or wrongly, I have the feeling I have passed that test. I shall wear this like a medal.

I met him several times in Washington, at this cocktail party or that dinner, and I'd sometimes say hello when he lunched at my favorite restaurant or as he limped with his cane through Georgetown, my neighborhood too, nodding shyly to those he met; but, alas, I never knew him — didn't know that he'd always been uncertain about his wonderful gifts, didn't know the battles he'd fought or the dues he'd paid, didn't know that he'd probably done the best he could with what he had, didn't know he somehow felt he was more blessed than he deserved but had less than he'd earned, didn't know the pain he'd endured and the pain he'd inflicted, didn't know the grief and the guilt he carried, didn't know that he was probably as flawed, as screwed-up as most of the rest of us. It was, I think, my loss.

He wrote no memoir after he retired, but this deft portrait comes as close as anyone ever will to explaining a complex and complicated man "as elusive in death as in life." Schroth makes lucidly clear what those young producers failed to see in the brooding old face on their edit-room screen: who Eric Severeid was and what he represented. ♦

SHORT TAKES

THE CRACKED MIRROR

To focus on media professionalism in understanding the news courts the danger of seeing journalism as journalists themselves do. When journalists portray themselves as hard-working, well-informed professionals whose idealistic streak and dedication to truth are dimmed only by competitive pressures, deadlines, conservative owners, and allegiance to official rules, they bask in their integrity as professionals. This represents their own subjective experience, but at the same time it misunderstands journalism as a whole. Journalism is not the sum of the individual subjective experiences of reporters and editors but the source or structure that gives rise to them....

This point requires illustration. The self-understandings of journalists do not go far enough. Take, for instance, this one: "We ran the story this way because the publisher/editor/producer has to keep his/her eye on the bottom line." The "bottom line" is one of the most elastic cultural constructs in the modern world. Not that there aren't financial constraints — businesses do regularly fail. But accounting is more art than science. This is especially true for news institutions, which normally operate with high profit margins and a high degree of organizational "slack," so that cutting costs or watching a budget is hardly ever a sufficient, or even genuine, explanation for why news is handled the way it is.

Or consider this sort of explanation: "We did not cover X or Y better because we were under deadline pressure." For more than thirty years print journalists have been saying that they can't compete with television as a "headline service." And for thirty years they still defend shoddy work by deadline pressure. *The Wall Street Journal* doesn't publish on Saturday or Sunday. Why does everyone else? Deadline pressure, like economic constraint, exists, but it is socially constructed, manipulable, revisable.

FROM **THE POWER OF NEWS**, BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON. HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 269 PP. \$29.95.

THE WAY WE WERE



Lowell Thomas was one of TV's first newsmen, but his 1940 NBC show was just a simulcast of his radio broadcast. The only visual was a stack of Sunoco oil cans, a sponsor. The trade press was critical: "TV is destined to be the mechanized Fuller Brush of the future."

FROM **PLEASE STAND BY: A PREHISTORY OF TELEVISION**, BY MICHAEL RITCHIE. THE OVERLOOK PRESS. 247 PP. \$23.95.

THE FLYTRAP

I guess I don't understand journalism. You hear that thing about a fly on the wall, that a journalist should be a fly on the wall, watching. But that was bullshit. Say you're in the room, you can't focus on anything when there's a fly on the wall. You watch it. If it doesn't move you wonder if it died there. Then turn it around, think of the fly. It's trying to home in, to lick stuff off your hands. Or more likely it's trying to get out, banging its head against the glass. It's desperate. I'm just saying it's a whole relationship.

FROM **COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO**, A NOVEL BY PHILIP WEISS. FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX. 295 PP. \$21.

LUDWIG'S LAW

Wittgenstein asked: What remains if I subtract my arm's going up from my raising it? The answer, of course, is the agent's intention. The newsmaker's intentions frequently are a part of the story, and so, occasionally, is the reporter's role in it.

Journalistic neutrality should not preclude, for example, a reporter's writing that a given story on some government official was strongly urged upon him or her during an airport meeting by someone sympathetic (or antagonistic) to that official. We're clueless enough about how and by whom issues are decided without critical information about the reporter's own role in the story being omitted as a matter of course. The real story is often not some statement X put out by Y, but that Y said X with a specific intention, or that Z wanted Y to be linked with X, or that W used Y's desire to link Y with X to advance his own goals, and that reporter R is associated with Y, Z, or W, or knows of these or other associations, or even is Y, Z, or W.

FROM **A MATHEMATICIAN READS THE NEWSPAPER**, BY JOHN ALLEN PAULOS. BASIC BOOKS. 212 PP. \$18.

ETCHED IN ETHER

The word processor is not, never mind what some writers say, "just a better typewriter." It is a modification of the relation between the writer and the language . . .

Writing on the computer promotes process over product and favors the whole over the execution of the part. As the writer grows accustomed to moving words, sentences, and paragraphs around — to opening his lines to insertions — his sense of linkage and necessity is affected. Less thought may be given to the ideal of inevitable expression. The expectation is no longer that there should be a single best way to say something; the writer accepts variability and is more inclined to view the work as a version. The Flaubertian tyranny of *le mot juste* is eclipsed, and with it, gradually, the idea of the author as a sovereign maker.

FROM **THE GUTENBERG ELEGIES: THE FATE OF READING IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE**, BY SVEN BIRKERTS. FABER AND FABER. 231 PP. \$22.95.



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Los Angeles Times 2/3/95

Renewed debate over the Downtown Napa Clocktower is heating up again. Dirty and difficult to clean city officials are looking for ideas on what to do with the edifice.

The Napa County (Calif.) Record 2/10/95

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Milwaukee Sentinel 3/18/95

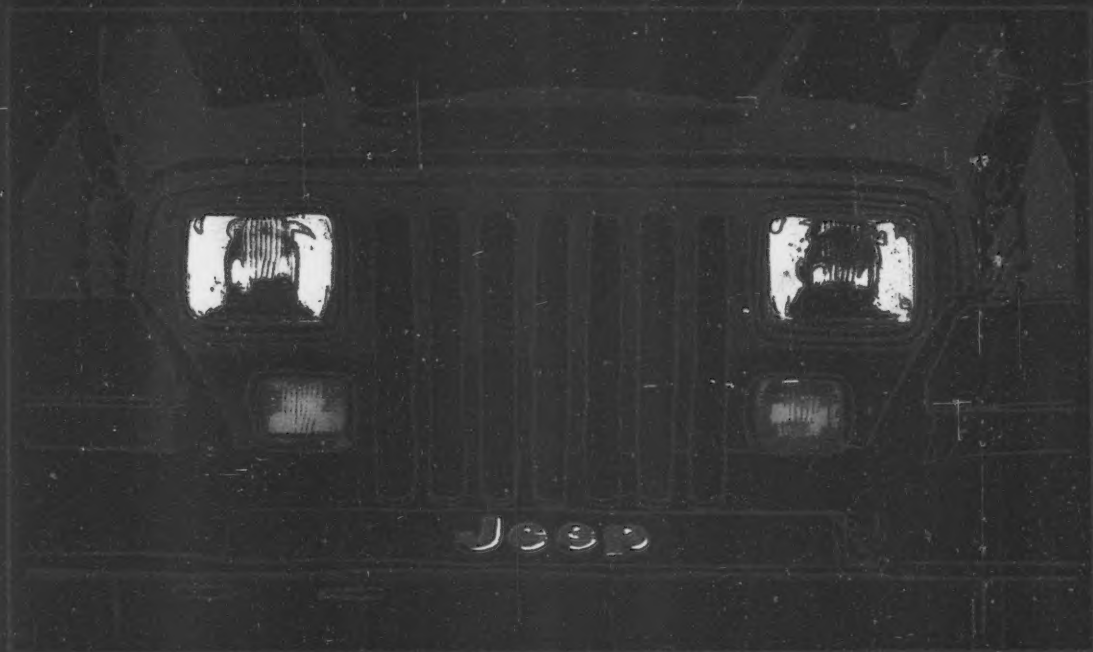
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The Crescent-News (Defiance, Ohio) 2/24/95

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